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SQUARE
Memories
1914-1918

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Lieut.-Colonel
E.C.Cadman, D.S.O.
Commanding
2/8th R.War.R.
1916-1918.
Killed in action
May 27, 1918.

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BLACK SQUARE MEMORIES

An Account of the 2/8th Battalion
The Royal Warwickshire Regiment
1914-1918

By H. T. CHIDGEY
An Officer of the same Battalion

Stratford-*upon*-Avon: Printed
at the Shakespeare Head Press
Oxford: Basil Blackwell
1924

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FOREWORD

THIS book was commenced at the outset as a manuscript narration of my personal recollections of the battalion of which for nearly two and a half years I was a humble member. I had no intention of writing a history which might in the end be circulated among my colleagues of the Black Square Dining Club —the only organized remainder of the dear old 2/8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

Somehow it leaked out that I had started to write up some reminiscences, and at a B.S.D.C. Committee Meeting someone suggested that a history of the Battalion ought to be written, and I was asked whether I would undertake to write this.

I agreed to do so, and my only apology for having myself written these pages, which do not pretend to any literary merit whatever, is my own keenness and earnest hope that some lasting memento of the unit should remain.

Controversial matters have been avoided, and where any opinions are given, they are only given because they must express the views of most, if not all, readers.

It would have seemed the right thing to incorporate with this small book a complete roll of all ranks who served with, or were attached in any way to the 2/8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. I fear it would have been quite impossible to compile a roll which could have been definitely stated to be complete in every way, so the next best thing has been done—to include a complete roll of officers and a roll of all other ranks known to have been killed or to have died during the war period during or after attachment to the 2/8th Battalion.

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FOREWORD

It may be said by some that too little has been written of the darker side of our experiences—not enough of the hardships which the men had to endure; of the terror of the barrage, the dread of night-bombing from the air, the horror of slaughter and mutilation; and that these pages give rather the impression that the 2/8th R. War. R., after all, had rather a pleasurable time, by comparison with others.

Each one of us who served in France and went through any portion of the campaign, can, doubtless, at will, recall all the beastliness, the horror, the inhumanity and the tragedy. But is it good for us to do this? No amount of writing could describe, to those who were not there, conditions such as they existed, events in all their details. Is it not better, then, to dwell more on the lighter and less abominable parts of the story?

In conclusion, I wish to make grateful reference to the assistance I have received from Major J. R. Simcox, whose outline of the earlier history of the battalion I have quoted almost word for word; from Capt. A. L. Prosser, M.C., and A. L. Tosland, Esq., M.C., whose diaries have been invaluable in providing dates and other reliable records; from Capt. W. S. Farmer, M.C., and from all others who have taken an interest in the preparation of this volume.

H. T. CHIDGEY

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ERRATA

Page 140, *line* 2. The battle of Cambrai begun on November 20th, 1917, not the 24th.

Page 140, *line* 6 *from the bottom*. *For* six days *read* ten days.

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MEMORIES OF THE 2/8TH BATTALION THE ROYAL WARWICKSHIRE REGIMENT

CHAPTER I. EARLY DAYS

THE history of the Battalion started actually on the 15th of October, 1914, when Captain J. Ready Simcox, in hospital at Ingatestone, received orders to proceed to Aston Barracks, Birmingham, for the purpose of forming a second-line battalion to the 1/8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

On the following day, accordingly, accompanied by Lieut. Westwood, one staff-sergeant, one corporal, and three privates, Captain Simcox arrived at Aston and proceeded to form his 'Orderly Room.' The assistance of Major Hardisty, the secretary of the Warwickshire County Territorial Force Association, was procured, and the preliminary machinery set in motion.

Lieut.-Colonel T. Freer Ash, T.D., from the 1/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, was, on the 21st of October, 1914, posted to the command of the new unit, which, however, only existed on paper at the moment.

An active recruiting campaign was at once started by Colonel Ash and Captain Simcox—the Derby scheme had, of course, not yet started—and meetings and concerts were promoted, music halls and picture palaces invaded, employers of labour interviewed, and in a short time over 700 men had been attested.

Those who were associated with the battalion in its infancy will still, probably, retain vivid recollections of the trials which had to be borne, and the difficulty in working with practically no officers or N.C.O.'s, and

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next to nothing in the shape of arms or equipment. Very great credit is due to Colonel Ash and Captain Simcox for the splendid way in which they got the battalion on its feet with so little assistance. It was many months before second-line Territorial battalions were given their due share of notice by the authorities, attention being mainly concentrated on the 'Kitchener battalions.'

Colonel Ash had appointed Captain Simcox to be his Adjutant, and quickly selected his officers from numerous applicants for commissions in the new battalion.

Training in the early days at Aston was no easy matter, but the eager co-operation of the new officers overcame the difficulties of the situation, and the battalion began to take proper shape, especially as clothing, arms and equipment slowly made their appearance. The men were at first billeted in their own homes in the neighbourhood of the Barracks, and received subsistence allowance.

The Commanding Officer was anxious, at one time, to develop his battalion into an Officers' Training Corps, but this was not to be permitted. The composition of the battalion was very mixed—varying from the fine physique and intelligence of the Saltley College boys and Birmingham Tramway-men, who formed the bulk of 'A' Company, to the indifferent material forming the Company of 'duds,' who were soon drafted to the 1/8th Battalion only to be returned, however, a few days later, as not up to the required standard. A severe blow was experienced when the munitions campaign started and

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large numbers of men were 'combed out' and sent to the factories and works.

On the 4th of February, 1915, came the first move. The battalion was ordered to Northampton and was billeted on the townspeople. The 2/5th, 2/6th and 2/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, which had also come into existence, were also moved to Northampton, and all four units were formed into a Brigade under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Palmer.

Transport for the unit arrived in the shape of six untrained mules, and Gough was appointed Transport Officer and had the unenviable job of making mules do what he wanted and not what they wanted to do. The Commanding Officer made use of one of these mules as a charger, failing the supply of anything better.

On the 24th of March, 1915, the battalion was moved to Coggeshall in Essex, where the billeting area of the 1/8th was taken over, the latter unit having proceeded overseas on the 23rd.

A further move came on the 28th of April, when the battalion moved to Billericay, and was at once engaged in trench-digging operations on a section of the outer defences of London.

May 12th saw a move back to Colchester, and the impression gained ground that the battalion would be sent to France as a unit, especially as all those who had not yet volunteered for foreign service were detached and passed on to one of the Provisional Battalions for service on the coast. A notable feature of these early days was the 'levées,' held on most afternoons of the week

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by the Commanding Officer at his billet. These gatherings were quite informal and were frequently graced by the presence of Mrs. Freer Ash. Though mainly of a social character, opportunity was usually taken to go through the morning's work and to discuss future programmes of work and training.

More advanced training became common, but not a great deal of battalion training could be done, owing to the frequency with which drafts for the 'first-line' battalion were called for and had to be met.

This, although at the time inevitable, was bound to be discouraging to a unit which was already beginning to develop the *esprit* which was to be its proud possession later on.

The next move was, on the 18th of June, 1915, to Chelmsford. For a time Colonel Freer Ash was away on sick leave, and during his absence the battalion was temporarily commanded by Captain (now Lieut.-Colonel) P. H. Whitehouse. After a short period, Major J. R. Nuttall was posted to the battalion as second-in-command, and, later, when Colonel Freer Ash was gazetted out on medical grounds, Major Nuttall assumed command and was granted the temporary rank of Lieut.-Colonel.

On the 27th of July, 1915, the battalion marched to camp at Epping, near Thornwood Common. This was the first experience of canvas that the unit had yet had. It was not to be the last nor the least pleasant open-air camp. While in the Epping district the whole Division (then known as the 2/1st South Midland Division) was

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inspected by Lord Kitchener, and for this purpose marched to Chelmsford on the 5th of August, paraded for inspection on the 6th of August, and on the following day marched back to Epping—a fairly strenuous three days. The remainder of August was uneventful, being devoted to the usual company training and interior economy during the day and occasional 'night-ops.' September the 2nd saw a further move to Maldon in Essex, where a large meadow was shared with the 2/6th for another seven weeks under canvas.

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CHAPTER II. AT MALDON

MY own personal knowledge of the battalion starts at the 19th of October, 1915, when I made my first appearance as a 2nd-Lieutenant at the Camp at Maldon Wick, after nearly a year in the ranks of the 3/9th Battalion London Regiment. In those days the transition from ranker to officer was much easier than later, when service in Cadet Battalions was laid down as a necessary preliminary to the granting of a commission. When one decided to apply, all that was required was to seek an interview with the C.O. of the battalion one wished to join, fill in a form or two, have a few words with the C.O. and M.O. of one's own battalion, take the forms along to the Brigadier, obtain his blessing and await events. Gazette usually took only two or three weeks. My interview with Major Nuttall took place at Epping, but by the time I joined for duty the Brigade had split up, and half had gone to Danbury near Chelmsford and the other half—the 2/6th and 2/8th Battalions—to Maldon, both being under canvas.

Brigade Headquarters was at Danbury, and at this period was under the command of Brigadier-General Daubeney. The Brigade Major was Captain Hoskings, and the Staff-Captain Captain P. A. Landon.

I reported in the evening and found the Camp, in a meadow alongside the Great Eastern Railway Station of Maldon West, looking very deserted. In the anteroom I found Morris and MacNiven, and afterwards

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Hodgkins, the Quartermaster, appeared, and Captain Graves, the Medical Officer. Very few people, I think, knew the Q.M. by his surname; he was 'George' to all the officers.

The battalion, it appeared, was away on two or three days' manœuvres in the neighbourhood of Great Totham, where were some sort of trenches, this accounting for the deserted appearance of the Camp. I was made very welcome and advised by Morris to dispose of the 'tooth-pick,' as he described the sword I had brought, as very few officers possessed swords, and they were never used except at District Courts-martial. The battalion returned on the following day and I was introduced to all the officers then with the unit.

The nights were very cold at this time and it was satisfactory to know that we were likely, soon, to go into billets. I was posted to 'A' Company, at that time commanded by Stone, in the absence of Whatmore, who was attending a Company Commanders' Course of Instruction at Camberley. It was surprising to find that there were no other officers belonging to the Company, but I quickly found that 'A' was very weak in numbers and consisted of about 50 men, mostly of rather poor physique. The other Companies were considerably stronger and of better physique. I learnt that 'A' was to have the next draft from the 3/8th Battalion. The parades usually took the following form: In the mornings the battalion fell in in mass on the parade ground, the officers marching up and down in twos and threes in a dignified manner, until the arrival of the C.O. and

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Adjutant, when we fell in. After a brief inspection of the Companies by the C.O. they were split up into groups for specialist training—scouts under Guest, signallers under Harper, detachments for musketry under Hooton, and so on, and the officers were then divided up among these groups, except those whose services were required by their Company Commanders for 'interior economy' or other Company duties. There was little to do in the afternoons, as a rule, and a private room at the King's Head Hotel in the town served as a convenient rendezvous, usually well-attended, at the conclusion of the morning's work. This apartment, being in the town, was still more useful once we had taken over our billets and had no longer a battalion mess. At night an anti-aircraft picket of an officer and a few men had to be mounted on the roof of the ancient Moot Hall Tower. This was furnished alternately by ourselves and the 2/6th. Week-end leave was generously given and was much appreciated, it goes without saying.

On the 26th of October the battalion took over billets in the higher part of the town, these consisting of private houses in the various streets. All the men had beds and very quickly became part of the respective families, in most cases. The billeting arrangements were carried out by Capt. Laing. The officers were also in private houses, one or more to a house, and in most cases they had meals with the families. The Orderly Room was at Maldon Workhouse, also the Guard Room. Major Simcox and B. K. Parsons had private apartments also at the Workhouse. My own billet was extremely com-

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fortable, and I was provided with a private sitting-room, where I took my breakfast and lunch, the remaining meals being taken *en famille*. My host being an alderman of the Corporation, I was able to keep in touch with local affairs, and he being also a butcher with a prosperous business in the High Street from which he had only partially retired, the supplies of home-killed meat were of the best. He was also a keen gardener and poultry-keeper and had a well-stocked and extensive vegetable and fruit garden in addition to numerous poultry runs.

There was a good deal of nervousness on the part of the civilian inhabitants of Maldon on account of possible visits from hostile aircraft. Zeppelins having passed over the town once or twice, even having dropped an incendiary bomb on one occasion, the townspeople firmly believed that at any moment, after dark, they might have a really dire visitation. All possible precautions were taken, therefore, and if any one of the very zealous special constables saw the slightest suspicion of a light, he would immediately work himself up into a great state of excitement and proceed to threaten all sorts of penalties on the offending householder if he did not at once conceal or put out the light. It was considered injudicious for anyone to strike a match to light a cigarette or pipe in the street, and protests were heard on more than one occasion. One feels rather surprised that the local authorities went quite so far as to put a band of luminous paint round the street-lamp columns, with the idea of preventing collisions. The funniest thing was the stopping of the town clock's quarter-hour chimes

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after dark, in case they should be heard by hostile airmen. However, in spite of its obsession, Maldon was a friendly place, and there were many sorry to leave it when the time came. On Fridays there were the billeting charges to pay. With a small Company like 'A' this was not a very lengthy proceeding, but it provided a diversion. In the evenings there were sometimes smoking concerts and boxing contests in the Assembly Rooms. There were also occasional dances, either here or in the Wantz Road School.

In November I had gone to Bisley for a three weeks' machine-gun course, which I found very interesting and enjoyable. On my return I found Tosland had joined from my former battalion, and had taken up his quarters at my billet. It was now an understood thing, so I learned, that Hewins was to come back to the battalion and have a Company, while I was to take over the Machine Gun Section. Hewins in due course returned, but his machine-gun duties at Danbury were taken over, temporarily, by B. K. Parsons. The four M.G. sections were brigaded at Danbury under Chovil, the Brigade Machine-gun Officer. This arrangement rather pleased me, as I was still very green and had not yet had much experience in company and battalion work, and I should thus have opportunities which I badly needed. A number of officers shortly left us for the 3/8th Battalion; Hewins took command of 'B' Company; Lefroy joined us and took over 'C' Company, P. H. Whitehouse having returned from a course of training with the Guards at Chelsea Barracks, and now acting as second-in-command. Temple had the command of 'D' Company.

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During January 1916 we were reinforced by a considerable draft of exceedingly good men from the 3/8th Battalion. Most of these came to 'A' Company, and at last we had something like a real Company. Many of these men came from Saltley College, and, as might be expected, they were men of a high order of intelligence. Tosland, who had been posted also to 'A', and I myself at last had platoons, but not for long. I was packed off to Ongar for a course of training in Field Engineering, while Tosland took over the Signal Section from Harper.

Evidence was increasing daily that we should shortly go overseas. There had been a strict medical examination of officers, and sundry test papers had been set us to answer, at the instigation of higher authority. Training was brought up-to-date and visits from brass-hats became more numerous. A new Divisional Commander took over from Lord Salisbury. The General found great fault with the saluting of the officers of the Division and took early opportunity of saying so to the officers themselves, by Brigades. Thus, one day, after some field operations, the General summoned the officers to a 'pow-wow' and then delivered himself of some scathing comments on our disgraceful saluting. He then ordered the Brigade-Major to give us all several minutes' practice in 'right-hand salute' by numbers.

Speaking of field operations, reminds one of Loddards Hill and Spar Hill, in the neighbourhood of the village of Woodham Mortimer, where most of our large scale manœuvres took place. These two hills, together with the high ground at Purleigh and Cold Norton,

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were notable features in a country which was, for the most part, decidedly flat.

The Divisional Commander mentioned stayed only a very short time, and was succeeded by Sir Colin Mackenzie, C.M.G., who eventually took us across the water.

My course at Ongar proved most interesting and lasted three weeks. Being near my home, I was able to have fairly long week-ends with my family. These Courses of Instruction were wonderfully useful to the young officer. Apart from their undoubted instructional value, they helped enormously to set him firmly on his feet and to develop in him the self-reliance which he would so much need at a later stage in his military career. One of the most valuable courses was that in Musketry at Bisley, and among others who had the good fortune to be selected for this particular course was S. E. Parsons.

On leaving Ongar I was informed that my Division, now known as the 61st (South Midland) Division, had moved to Salisbury Plain. The move took place by train during the second week in March, 1916, in a fearful snowstorm which lasted throughout the journey, a long, and consequently, very uncomfortable one.

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CHAPTER III. THE PLAIN

THE 2/8th Battalion shared Jellalabad Barracks, Tidworth, with the 2/6th, the other two battalions and Brigade Headquarters being in huts at Perham Down, near Ludgershall.

We had a joint Officers' Mess with the 2/6th, and I fear this was not as pleasant as it might have been from the feeding point of view. I think it must have been the breakfast menu which really did it. After the porridge —the best part of the meal—one could have ham, tongue or pressed beef. This, however, was not invariable, for the mess-waiters frequently announced pressed beef, tongue or ham, or even, on occasion, tongue, pressed beef or ham. Army jam, too, made its appearance for the first time, and made a bad impression. Officers' Quarters, when shared by two units with practically full war-strength in personnel, were, naturally enough, insufficient. Many of us had to 'sleep out,' as it were, in Married Quarters, which we made tolerably comfortable, although, of course, the accommodation was far inferior to the proper Officers' Quarters.

Middleton and Prosser joined us from the 3/8th, and we were also heavily reinforced by a number of 10th Royal Scots Officers of considerable seniority; likewise by drafts of N.C.O.'s and men of the same Regiment, and from various Hampshire, Manchester, Cheshire, King's Own, and Loyal North Lancs. Battalions. We were approaching full strength, and were assimilating some splendid material.

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Having now achieved the name of the 'Battalion Courser,' the writer was expected to live up to his reputation, and accordingly, after only one night at Tid worth, hurried off again, this time to Hayling Island, for a Lewis-gun Course. Returning after ten days, he at last took over the Machine-gun Section from B. K. Parsons, and the Lewis-gun training from Harper. The Section was now with the Battalion, and the stores were found to be woefully incomplete. We had a limber, to be sure, one Maxim-gun of antique pattern, one or two wooden dummy guns, and very little else. Changes were in the air, however, and we learned that a new organization—the Machine-gun Corps—was about to come into existence. All the Battalion M.G. officers of the Division were invited to transfer to the new unit, and were then told they could not, but must remain with their own battalions, assume the title 'Lewis-gun Officer,' give up their mounts, and go on training Lewis-gunners as hard as they could. Stores were handed in, and two brand new Lewis-guns were issued complete with all spare parts.

Companies had now been rearranged somewhat and the officers re-distributed. Company Commanders were now:—'A' Company, Whatmore; 'B' Company, McKay; 'C' Company, Lefroy; 'D' Company, Lapham; with, as Seconds-in-Command, Mungle, Hewins, Brock, and Field respectively. What an important office the Regimental Sergeant-Major holds was amply demonstrated to all of us during these weeks in barracks, and as far as our battalion was concerned, R.S.M.

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Davis filled that position with dignity and the utmost efficiency. Barrack-life, with its formalities and stringencies and routine demands a great deal more work from the R.S.M. than a mere hut or canvas encampment, or yet billets, and here at Jellalabad one had constant opportunity for admiring the methods and successful supervision of R.S.M. Davis. Our Company Sergeant-Majors, too,—Scrivener, of 'A' Coy., Harper, of 'B' Coy., Mead, of 'C' Coy., and Holloway, of 'D' Coy., were all men of sterling worth, hard-working and efficient, and all devoted to the interests of their respective Companies.

Lieut.-Colonel Nuttall relinquished command of the battalion and handed over to the new Commanding Officer, whose former Regiment was the King's Own. The first impressions many of us had of Lieut.-Colonel Cadman were that here was a man to be feared and respected, a commanding officer who would not be satisfied with anything less than the best from his officers and all others under his orders; one who would probably not forgive a mistake quickly, who would be a martinet in respect of discipline, military etiquette and punctilious obedience to his orders. So long as we were at Jellalabad Barracks with the joint mess, there were not many opportunities of getting to know the new C.O., and, for this period, at any rate, most of us held him very much in awe. But once we had a mess of our own at Perham Down Camp, things became different. We began to know the Colonel. Some of our first impressions had to be modified, for we soon found that the

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Colonel was, after all, very human. He did not expect perfection in anyone, but he did expect everyone to do his best, and as long as one did one's best allowances would be made for inexperience. In cases of delinquents the Colonel had the habit of speaking out exactly what was in his mind, without mincing matters, but, on the other hand, he did not harbour resentment. Discipline of the strictest he insisted on having, and an order, what ever its nature, had to be carried out exactly; but the Colonel had the interests of his battalion so much at heart that it soon became everyone's wish to please and back him up. Thus the personality of its Commanding Officer became communicated to the battalion, and this was the means of cementing together the varied elements forming the unit into a self-respecting entity with an individuality which gradually became the pride of each member, whatever his place of origin, were it Birmingham, Scottish Lowlands, Hampshire, London, Manchester, Cheshire or Lancashire. Soon, our early feelings of awe gave place to admiration, and later, to affection. The Battalion mess, at first a place for subdued conversation and 'party manners,' soon took on more the aspect of a big contented family. Let it not be supposed that the varied components of the battalion lost their separate identity. Lancashire and Cheshire, for instance, never became Warwickshire in habits or speech, and the 'Scotties,' equally with the men of Southampton, did not relinquish their delightful accent for the language peculiar to Birmingham. No one could

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have wished to hear Sergeant Hutchinson of 'C' Company, or Private Walker, devoted batman to Farmer, speaking the tongue commonly associated with Witton or Lozells. There was a little difficulty about cap badges at first, but the men soon became accustomed to wearing the antelope in their caps; and if, when on leave, some of them reverted to their former regimental badge for a few days, or proudly sallied forth in the Royal Scot glengarry, who shall say they were wrong? But though the Scotties retained, to a certain degree, their native clannishness, and the men from Manchester never forgot the city they loved, nor the fact that they were the first to have seen active service, which they did with the 42nd Division in Gallipoli, yet perfect harmony prevailed with their predominant partners from the South Midlands. The greatest proportion of the 'Scotties,' by the way, belonged to 'C' Coy., and one must mention 'C' Coy's., 'Brown' Lewis-gun Section, composed entirely of Browns, all but one being Scotch, a very efficient Section, whose fame spread well beyond the limits of their own Company.

Major Beer, from the Sussex Yeomanry, was posted to us as Second-in-Command, and Captain E. G. Davis, from the Essex Regiment, took over the duties of Adjutant from Major Simcox, who proceeded to a Provisional Battalion.

Changes had also taken place at Brigade Headquarters, where Brigadier-General Gordon was now in command, with Major Heelis as his Brigade-Major. There

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was something fresh every day. One day we would observe a mysterious sign newly painted on the limbers and G.S. wagons,

the overseas mark of the 61st Division, so it was announced, the mystery thereupon being cleared up, the sign consisting merely of the Roman equivalents of the figures 60 and 1 superimposed. Then there was the issue of Battalion shoulder signs to all ranks—in our case, a square of black material. The remaining battalions of the 182nd Brigade were given red, blue and yellow squares—a square being the approved shape for our Brigade. The 183rd and 184th Brigades had triangular and circular patches, the colours corresponding to those in our Brigade, while the Machine-gun Companies had green patches shaped according to the pattern of their respective Brigades. The superstitious among us saw unpleasant omens in the 'black square' which we were henceforth to carry on each shoulder, but this feeling quickly disappeared and was soon replaced by something akin to pride.

Training became more and more advanced. There were Brigade Days and Divisional Days. There was a two days' trek and operations among the near-by villages, and practice in billeting. There was a twenty-four hours' occupation of a trench system at 'Bedlam Buildings,' finishing up with a trench-to-trench attack with

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smoke and fire and explosions and rattles and staff-officers—in fact, everything to make one imagine that this was something like the real thing. One remembers a short conversation, in the dark, between a certain private and the Divisional G.S.O.1. It was very dark, and perhaps G.S.O.1 might have been pardoned for the enquiry, 'Is this a trench?' The private's counter-question, in private's language, as to whether there was any noticeable resemblance to a cab-rank, would not have been excusable, had he been aware of the exalted rank of the gentleman addressing him.

A good deal of enjoyment was provided by really good shows at the Garrison Theatre. Without this the evenings would have been indeed dull.

About the end of April the Brigade concentrated at Perham Down Camp, and training became more arduous as the weather got hotter. There was a fearsome heat-wave in the early part of May, during which a long and trying Divisional route march through Bulford took place, and a considerable number of men were overcome. Before leaving Tidworth Barracks we had all fired our General Musketry Course at Bulford, to which we marched and returned each day. The C.O., who, for a time, had been Divisional Musketry Officer, was particularly keen on this important branch of training and spent a great deal of time with us on the ranges.

We found the Perham Down huts really much more agreeable than the Barracks we had vacated. At last we had a battalion mess of our own, and many jolly evenings were spent therein. Morris's splendid gramophone

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was much in demand in these days. The town of Andover, being conveniently near, attracted visitors from among us, on numerous occasions, but the C.O. expected a full attendance at mess each evening.

Further small drafts came along and four more Royal Scots officers—Farmer, Hamilton, Garland and Thom. We were also joined by our new M.O., Evans, after having been without one since Maldon, Dr Graves not being in sufficiently robust health for overseas service. The Division was inspected by H.M. The King, and a very impressive episode this was. Now the four days' embarkation leave commenced for everyone. Gas-masks were issued, the last final touches were added, and on the 21st of May, 1916, the Battalion left Ludgershall Station by train for Southampton Docks, where the whole Division embarked for France.

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CHAPTER IV. B.E.F., FRANCE.

THE Transport of the various units forming the Division embarked separately, and certain officers were detailed from the Battalions to sail with their respective Battalions' transport. In the late afternoon a small fleet of troopships with an escort of destroyers left Southampton Docks and were very soon in the open Channel. Those who travelled with the transport rather scored in having considerably more room to move and much more comfortable quarters. At least this was true of the S.S. *City of Benares*, in which my own experiences were of the pleasantest. A fine *table d'hôte* meal in the evening and a cabin for two in which I managed six hours of unbroken sleep between clean sheets, and this in spite of the submarine menace which was just beginning to be really troublesome—this was indeed a pleasant introduction to the war.

On the morning of the 22nd we landed at the great French port of le Hâvre, and immediately marched through the town, by battalions, to the evident satisfaction of many townspeople and accompanied by numerous children, who demanded 'bully-bif' and 'biscuits.' The camp to which we marched was at Ste-Adresse, a short distance out of Hâvre, with which it was connected by tramway; the first-named being a small town of picturesque villas, and, as will be remembered, the temporary headquarters of the Belgian Government. After taking possession of the camp and seeing everyone comfortably arranged, we had a scratch meal, and,

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permission having been granted, many of the officers took the tram down into Hâvre and explored this rather fine town, of which the French people are so justly proud.

The following morning, early, we marched down to Hâvre Goods Station, and there followed the inevitable long wait, during which the creature comforts of the troops were attended to by numerous lady voluntary workers of British nationality. One admired the splendid way in which these ladies turned out at unearthly hours and dispensed tea, coffee and food to the always ready troops. In time our troop train appeared—the usual assortment of goods waggons labelled 'hommes 40, chevaux 8 (en long),' and a few second-rate passenger coaches for the officers. We entrained, taking with us the twenty-four hours' rations that had been issued, and finally steamed out, jerkily, for an unknown destination. The journey lasted nearly twenty-four hours, with many stops and a long rest at the *halte repas* at Montérolier-Buchy for hot tea, etc. I suppose most people eventually got some sleep. Personally I am one of those unfortunate people who rarely, if ever, can get to sleep in a train. At last we came to a full stop at the little junction of Berguette. Naturally enough there had been a great deal of interest in the route being followed, and the passage of our train through Rouen, Amiens, Boulogne, St-Omer and Hazebrouck gave us a fair idea as to our whereabouts from time to time.

We detrained and found outside the station some welcome hot refreshment, prepared by an advance party under the direction of Landon, the ever-popular Staff-

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Captain of the 182nd Brigade. A few kilometres' march brought the 2/8th Battalion to their billeting area at a not very great distance from the large mining town of Béthune. We found tolerably good billets in the very scattered hamlet of l'Eclème in the middle of a flat agricultural country intersected by ditches, small streams and canals, the largest of the last-named being the la Bassée Canal, already well-known to us by name. The ditches teemed with bull-frogs, which, at sunset every fine evening, made the air resonant with their croakings. Brigade headquarters was at Gonnehem, a few kilometres away, and the other battalions were billeted here and in the neighbouring hamlets and villages. Divisional headquarters was at the little town of St Venant. We were now joined by our French interpreter, a cheerful fellow who called himself 'Harry.'

After comfortably settling down in our temporary quarters, our training, preparatory to taking over a sector of trenches, commenced. The usual musketry, bombing, Lewis-gun work, physical and bayonet training were practised, together with occasional route marches and bathing in the la Bassée Canal under the C.O.'s direct supervision. The first entries were made in the men's pay-books, and cash was drawn weekly from the XIth Corps Field Cashier at Hinges. Two very regrettable incidents took place during our stay at l'Eclème. In one, a live round accidentally fired from a Lewis-gun during instructional training, resulted in one man, Private Tait, being killed, and another being badly wounded in the wrist. The whole battalion accompanied Tait

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to his last resting-place in the little churchyard at Robecq, a small town near by. Full military honours were given, and an impressive service took place in Robecq Church. The other accident happened during the instruction of a squad of men in live-bomb throwing. An unfortunate individual in a fit of 'nerves' dropped a live 'Mills,' and Morris, in a brave attempt to avert danger to the squad, was badly damaged in the leg and in one eye. His injuries were such as to necessitate evacuation to England, and he unhappily lost an eye and became partially lame in one leg.

On the 7th of June we left l'Eclème and marched via Béthune to billets at Beuvry and le Quesnoy, preparatory to going into the line for instructional purposes at Cuinchy alongside the la Bassée Canal. The battalion went in in two separate halves by half companies, and became attached for about twenty-four hours to the battalion holding the sector. Here was 'Harley Street,' a road running parallel to the front line, at no great distance, and dangerous at night, especially, owing to the enemy's frequent machine-gun activity. In daylight it was possible, owing to camouflage screens, to move along this road without serious risk. Here also were the famous 'brickstacks,' which no amount of shell-fire ever greatly damaged; the 'railway triangle' near la Bassée Station, and two enormous mine craters within our lines which had been organized for defence. On the other side of the canal was Givenchy-lez-la Bassée, already famous, and to become still more famous in the later stages of the war.

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While in this sector we made an early acquaintance with the Boche heavy trench-mortar bomb, or 'Minnie,' which would fall vertically into a trench, tear up a great hole and make an ear-splitting noise in exploding. The advantage of a 'Minnie' was that you could easily trace it in its flight, being large, noisy, and very slow-moving.

It was all very interesting and, except during a strafe, so uncannily quiet, so utterly unlike anything we had ever imagined war to be. How comfortable some of those dug-outs were—mostly cellars of old ruined houses, piled on top with *debris* and strong enough to withstand fairly heavy shelling. During our instructional period in the trenches the enemy blew up a mine a little distance away. This caused some local excitement, but was not followed by any serious attack.

We were quickly taken out from the line at Cuinchy, having sustained no casualties, and packed off again to l'Eclème, on the 10th of June. On the march back the battalion band excelled itself, playing us practically all the way back and keeping up our spirits which, after four somewhat arduous days, were a trifle the worse for wear. I always associate the strains of 'A Broken Doll' with this long march, marking, as it did, the conclusion of our introduction to trench warfare. How often does some refrain or remark become perennially associated in one's mind with some special period or event!

After two days' rest at l'Eclème we marched, on the 12th of June, to Merville, in those days a jolly little town, whose acquaintance we were to make very thoroughly. During the two days at l'Eclème a number of

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men were detached and despatched on various special duties in charge of officers—a small party went with Garland to the Trench Mortar Battery, another under B. K. Parsons to the Forest of Nieppe, near by, where they were engaged in wood-cutting and tree-felling work, and a third party marched off under Prosser, to be attached, for some time, to an Australian Mining Company working underground in the sector of front line allocated to the 61st Division. Sundry other small parties were frequently called for, from time to time, for special work. For instance, a number of men had to be loaned to the Machine-gun Company for a week or two.

The battalion was billeted very comfortably in the eastern portion of the town and in the neighbouring hamlet of Robermetz. The area was very extensive, and in consequence the billets were scattered and the orderly officers had a long round when inspecting. I had a good billet with a Belgian family, my room containing a comfortable spring mattress bedstead, but no sheets or blankets. This was no great hardship, of course, as one was quite used to sleeping-bag and blankets. I messed, at this time, with 'A' Company, whose mess was a very popular house of call, being on the road which most people had to take to get to their own temporary domiciles. We had a piano here and several of us could manage to play a little. Madame Harlatte, our hostess, had a lame daughter, Yvonne, who could sing a little, and we could thus manage to get a good deal of amusement in our spare time. In the town there was a good Y.M.C.A., where frequent concerts were given and men could pass their

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time pleasantly, playing games or writing home to let their friends know they were 'still in the pink.' Only a passing reference must be made to Mademoiselle Zeppelin, the lady of portly dimensions who sold baskets and similar ware in a little shop, and was very friendly-disposed to all British officers. Letter-censoring was one of the officers' least pleasant duties, and it was remarkable what an enormous correspondence the average Tommy seemed to keep up.

On the 17th of June came a move. We marched to a small hamlet, Riez Bailleul, in the forward area. We were about to take over a sector of front line, and at 'Rees-Baloo,' as the troops called it, we were in support to the battalion actually in the line. As might be expected, the billets were not very good and many of the civilian inhabitants had migrated.

Here we were told that, being new troops, we were expected to make a name for ourselves at the earliest opportunity. All the officers had already been lectured by the Corps Commander at Gonnehem, one afternoon, on the cultivation and maintenance of the offensive spirit. He informed us, on that occasion, that all new divisions, as they came to his corps, were speedily given their baptism of fire and given the opportunity of showing their mettle. In accordance with this policy, our 'D' Company commenced to rehearse a large-scale raid, which was to be launched on the enemy's lines from a small salient in our line known as the Neb. The enemy's trench system, as shown by aeroplane photographs, was carefully marked out on the ground with broad white

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tapes, and the troops made to advance as they were to do in the actual stunt, though the necessary shell-fire and other accompaniments could not be arranged.

On the 21st of June we proceeded to take over a portion of the Neuve Chapelle sector. We moved in single file in small parties across fields and along the la Bassée road to the entrance to the principal communication trench, known as 'Baluchi Trench,' which we entered and passed along to the front line. How interminable the trench seemed! It was a hot afternoon, and, speaking for the Lewis-gun section, we were considerably overloaded with ammunition, and, in consequence, found the journey very exhausting. Experience very quickly teaches, and we did not again make the same mistake. The gaps between the sections, of course, soon filled up, and the communication trench must have been full of men from end to end. There occurred, frequently, those inexplicable stoppages in the forward movement, and sometimes we wondered if we should ever reach our destination. We did, however, in the end, and very soon completed the taking-over process, the relieved battalion having no special desire to delay matters.

Having made our dispositions and sent in our reports to 'Hush Hall,' the battalion headquarters—an edifice consisting mostly of sandbags and iron sheets—we were able to look round. The enemy's line, seen through a periscope and indicated by masses of rusty barbed wire, lay at a distance averaging 100 yards in front of us. A few sandbags, here and there, showed up in the earth embankment. It seemed hard to realize that

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there were men, machine-guns and rifles concealed over there, ready to pick off anyone who had the temerity to show himself over our parapet.

Our own line consisted of irregular breastworks of sandbags and earth, with a parados of sandbags, in places, behind. There was a continuous duck-board track running around the fire-bays and round the traverses and sometimes behind the parados. There were no dug-outs, and a quite inadequate number of shelters consisting mostly of sandbag walls and timber and corrugated iron roofs with two or more sandbag layers thereon. None of these were shell-proof, and if a shell landed within a short distance of them, they positively rocked with the shock. Occasionally a direct hit would be scored, necessitating arduous repairs.

Behind us lay what remained of Neuve Chapelle village—a few heaps of brick rubbish, an orchard or two, an old gate, the ruins of the church with the famous Calvaire still intact, and the ruins of the brewery—a favourite target for the enemy's guns. Behind the enemy's lines lay the 'Bois du Biez,' the mysterious wood to which were attached various unearthly stories. This, in its turn, was a favourite spot for our own gunners. There was a curious prolonged echo from the wood whenever a shell exploded anywhere in its neighbourhood.

Our first night in our own sector of front line was a thing to be remembered. At dusk bayonets were fixed and all ranks were on the alert in the fire-bays, each man having an allotted position in one or other bay at evening or morning 'stand-to' as these alert periods were

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called. After dark, sentries mounted the fire-steps and kept look-out over 'no-man's land.' From time to time the enemy would sweep our parapet line with one or more of his machine-guns. This first night a very large proportion of the battalion went out into 'no-man's land' to 'have a look round,' and there were many unofficial patrols. Some of us were quickly satisfied with our inspection and, having experienced that eerie, uncanny feeling almost bound to be felt in 'no-man's land,' after dark, were soon back in the shelter of our own breastworks. Others were insatiable, and would willingly have stayed out all night. One of the earliest of the organized patrols was conducted by Brock, who, of a sudden, called 'Ssh,' whereat all the other members of the party lay flat, he alone standing stock still and listening intently. After a short pause, he was heard to say, in ordinary speaking voice, 'Well, I never heard it do that before,' referring, he afterwards explained, to some unusual noise made by a night-bird of some kind.

On Monday night, the 26th of June, the raid by 'D' Company, under Lapham and Field, assisted by Hooton, took place, after considerable advertisement in the shape of trench-mortar and artillery fire on the proposed point of entry. The assembly was carried out according to programme, but no sooner did our guns open out on their various objectives than the enemy put down a heavy barrage along 'no-man's land' and behind our front line. Briefly, the raid was not a success. There were no prisoners, and our own losses were quite considerable; and among the killed were, unhappily, Hooton and

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While, the latter being hit while his company 'C' was in support to the raiders, in the fire-trench. Apart from the known losses in killed and wounded, there was uncertainty about those who did not come back. Months later news filtered through, and we heard that Field, with a few men, actually got into the enemy trench and were captured. The rest of the missing, including Hooton, had been killed, and were collected and buried by the Germans. The Boche had brought up, so it was said, his 'travelling circus,' probably in reality a corps reserve of artillery, specially for the occasion, and certainly it was not a thing to be disregarded. That was really our first baptism of fire, and to probably most of us it was a nerve-racking experience. The principal advantage of a raid from the point of view of comfort, however, is that it is usually soon over, and although sometimes the other side retaliated with another raid in due course, yet this was not usually the case.

After this affair the next few weeks were, by comparison, peaceful, although the offensive spirit had to be maintained by frequent 'strafes' of rifle grenades and, especially, of trench mortar bombs, both Stokes and football varieties. These usually produced a mild retaliation of 'Minnies,' 'rum-jars' or 'pineapples.' On fine clear days each side would have observation balloons up at intervals of a mile or two. A feature of each tour was a short daily period of evening 'hate' from both sides, usually at 'stand-to,' consisting of a few minutes' sharp gunfire, generally. The usual daily programme in these 'quiet' sectors was a morning's work, an afternoon's

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rest, and, after evening 'stand-to,' work on the wire defences, patrols in 'no-man's land,' trench improvements, carrying parties, and, occasionally, raids on the enemy trenches. The morning's work usually consisted of cleaning-up trenches, repairing shelters, parapets and fire-steps—all frequently damaged by hostile shell-fire or trench-mortar bombs—constructing new shelters, of which there was always very great need, repairing duckboard tracks, and so forth. Packs were, of course, taken off, in the line, but it was a strict injunction that equipment and bayonets were always to be worn and gas masks to be carried, the last-named having to be inspected and tested daily. Shortly after the arrival of the improved box-respirator, orders were issued for these to be always carried in the 'alert' position.

Sentries, during the daylight hours, took turn of duty in the fire-bays, taking frequent peeps through the periscopes which were fixed at intervals along the front line. At night, all men not otherwise specially engaged were on sentry duty on the fire-steps, through most of the night, with bayonets fixed, and occasionally firing shots across to the enemy lines. An hour or two's sleep, at intervals, was usually possible for everyone, on most nights. The afternoon rest period was very necessary, but was sometimes, unhappily, interrupted by our own Stokes-gun demonstrations, and, occasionally, by the enemy's trench-mortar activity. Visits by Divisional and Brigade Commanders and Staff were fairly frequent, but these invariably took place during the morning.

No one is likely to forget the enormous number of

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rats which lived principally in the front line, in the walls of the dug-outs and in the breastworks generally. The rat population far exceeded the number of troops in any given sector, and had been, doubtless, attracted by the remnants of food which succeeding battalions were more or less bound to leave, here and there. The crumbs of food, however, were insufficient in quantity for the rodent population, and, in consequence, raids were frequently made on packs, parcels, equipment, men's clothing and anything that produced nourishment suitable for the rats' requirements. At night, walking along the duck-boards, it was difficult not to tread on a rat at practically every other step. A pastime, which amused some and provided a little useful target practice, consisted in firing revolvers at these troublesome pests, which not only helped themselves so liberally to one's belongings, but made sleep so difficult at times. The little beasts would sometimes run along the parapet sandbags at night, giving the sentries the opportunity of a little bayonet practice or close-range rifle practice. But the few thus disposed of counted for next to nothing when one considered the endless thousands which shared the forward zones with us.

During these weeks we were in the line sometimes for eight, once for twelve days, but the usual tour worked out at six or eight days, with corresponding periods in support or 'rest,' at Pont du Hem, Riez Bailleul, la Gorgue or Merville.

At the conclusion of the first tour, on the 29th of June, we left the line for the support billets at Rue du

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Pont, a scattered hamlet off the la Bassée road. These 'billets' consisted mostly of ruined houses and concreted 'baby elephants' (steel troughing bent into semi-circular form). Headquarters was in a partly ruined house and was a tolerably comfortable place. Being in the forward area, we were likely to be shelled without warning, especially as our own field batteries were all around us. To give warning to troops to take cover, the regimental police were put on special look-out duty and blew a whistle on the arrival of the first shell.

On the 3rd of July the long twelve-days' tour started. This time we were in the centre sector in front of Rue Tilloloy, moving slightly to the right a week later, on account of a re-arrangement of the divisional front. In this sector, as in the right sector, mining operations were a special feature. Australian tunnelling companies were engaged in preparing and blowing up mines under the enemy front line, the Boche retaliating, as opportunity offered, in the same manner under our front line. We had had to supply a considerable party of men to work with one of these tunnelling companies, and although Prosser, who was in charge, returned to us after about a month, the men who had formed his party remained away from the battalion for a considerable time longer.

On the 13th of July, Guest, who was our Intelligence and Sniping officer, was unhappily shot in the head, and though he lingered for several weeks never regained consciousness and died in hospital. I remember how very cheerful he was on the 13th as he exchanged jokes with

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several of us outside 'Hush Hall' just before setting out for his usual morning tour of the various sniping-posts. The loss of Guest, who was a most competent officer, although, also, one of the youngest, was greatly felt by all ranks. By his charming and happy-go-lucky disposition he had endeared himself to everyone, and his smiling and happy face was in itself a tonic at any time. We were relieved, in what had now become the right sector, on the 15th of July, by a battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment, and marched to billets at la Gorgue, where we remained in divisional reserve for a short time. Billets were fairly good here, but there was not much rest to be had this time. The day after our arrival, a Sunday, most of the battalion received orders to march to Rue Masselot, a road running parallel with the front line behind the centre sector, pick up gas cylinders and carry them to the troops in the front line, where they were taken over and put into position in the fire-bays, ready for use when required. Then the news leaked out, there was to be an attack on the 17th, and much additional artillery had been brought up and got into position. The idea of the 'show' was to secure a diversion of German reinforcements and guns believed to be on their way to the Somme battle-front, where the great offensive had already been in progress over a fortnight.

The attack had as its objective the enemy second line trench system, which was to be held for a time, if reached, but not permanently. Two divisions were involved, our own and an Australian division on our left, and the 182nd Brigade provided two attacking battalions, the

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2/6th and 2/7th Royal Warwickshires, with the 2/5th and two companies of the 2/8th in support and the remaining two companies of the 2/8th in reserve at la Gorgue. The attack was timed to take place on the morning of the 17th, but was postponed on account of a heavy mist obscuring all the artillery aiming-marks. The same day appeared the famous 'order to be read to all ranks' from the Corps Commander, in which the troops were informed that the postponed attack would take place two days later, *i.e.*, on the 19th of July. The 'show' duly took place on Wednesday, the 19th of July, a date which will always remain a memorable one to all those taking any part in the affair. The artillery preparation was very intense and produced a heavy retaliation. At the appointed moment our barrage lifted and the troops went over the top and through the various sally ports—all well-known to the enemy by his aeroplane photographs. The Boche riflemen and machine-gunners having retired to their strong concrete shelters, where they remained in safety during the bombardment, emerged as soon as the barrage lifted and blazed away with rifles and machine-guns at the advancing British troops. One German machine-gunner was alleged to have fired 14,000 rounds in the course of the day. Certainly the hostile fire was very deadly, and many fine fellows fell in 'no man's land.' At many points of the attacked trenches an entry into the enemy's line was effected, and the objective, in some cases, reached and even passed. About 120 German prisoners were taken, but the enemy claimed over 400 Britishprisoners, and there is not the slight-

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est doubt that our casualties, in what was officially described as a 'successful raid,' were far heavier than the enemy's, running, as they did, into the neighbourhood of six thousand between the two attacking divisions.

A withdrawal from the enemy's line was necessary in the afternoon, and 'B' and 'C' Companies of the 2/8th Battalion, under Captain Lefroy, in support, were moved up into the front line at an early hour. The remaining companies of our battalion, held in readiness at la Gorgue, were rushed up in the early evening by motor-'buses to Laventie, and after dark went into the line and relieved the remainder of the 2/6th and 2/7th Battalions. It will be impossible to forget the scene of destruction and havoc which was everywhere apparent in the front and support lines and communication trenches. Many good fellows were lost that day, including Lieut.-Colonel Beer, commanding the 2/4th Royal Berks, who had come out with us as second-in-command. The officer casualties were very heavy in all the attacking battalions. Padre Bennett, whose rescue work among the wounded on the 19th and 20th of July will always be remembered, was awarded the M.C.—the first in the battalion. Wonderful work was done, too, by our own 'B' and 'C' Companies in bringing in wounded in daylight from 'no man's land.' During this fine work Rich was wounded badly in the foot. 'B' Company was, at this time, temporarily commanded by Brock, following on the departure of Mackay on base duty for awhile.

We remained in the line until the 24th of July, and during that time received reinforcements of officers from

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the South Lancs. and Lancashire Fusiliers Regiments. On the 21st of July Stone was killed by a chance bullet in 'no man's land,' just after starting out on a reconnoitring patrol near the Duck's Bill salient. On the 23rd we took over an additional bit of line from an East Yorkshire battalion on our right. About this time we were joined by Major W. E. Phillips, M.C., from the Leinster Regiment, who became our new second-in-command. On the 24th we were relieved by the 2/8th Worcesters early in the morning. The battalion assembled in Laventie, partook of an enjoyable *al fresco* breakfast in a field, and then proceeded by motor-'buses to Merville. The tour now completed had been an exacting one and much hard work had been necessary to make the line again habitable after the destruction wrought during the recent attack. We were now to lose our popular adjutant, Captain E. G. Davis, whose health had been steadily worsening. He proceeded to England and spent a long time in hospital before recovering. His place was taken by Morton. We were given a very pleasant week at Merville in our former billets, with baths, cleaning-up and quiet training. On the 28th we had an officers' dinner at the Hotel de Ville, to celebrate our return to rest billets after a strenuous period. Victorine, famous for champagne cocktails, was still there, and welcomed us. We had the pleasure of entertaining, on this occasion, the Commanding Officer of the Scots Greys, who were stationed at this time at Merville.

On the 30th of July a divisional horse show and sports were held in a meadow alongside the river Lys at

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Estaires. A number of successes were gained by our battalion, especially by the C.O. with his beautiful hunter, 'Miss Jones.'

The 1st of August saw the battalion march back to hutments and billets at Riez Bailleul, where we were in support to the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. The 2/5th had already had some bad luck in the line, and if the enemy decided to raid our lines or to blow up a mine it might surely be conjectured that it would happen while the 2/5th were in the line. On the 7th of August a mine blew up, causing a number of casualties to the 2/5th, and it was ordered that the Lewis-gun sections of the 2/8th were to reinforce the former on the night of the 7/8th of August, in case of a hostile attack following the mine explosion. The remainder of the battalion went into line on the following day and relieved the 2/5th in the old centre sector and part of the right or Neuve Chapelle sector.

It is not to be supposed that these periods of support duty were passed in anything like idleness. For instance, working parties, small or large, had frequently to be furnished, after dark, for all sorts of jobs. Similarly, wiring parties, working under the direction of the R.E., were sometimes required, as also carrying and ration parties to places like Dead Horse Junction—a light railway junction whence stores were branched off by trolley to different parts of the forward areas. Occasionally, of course, there would be a 'certain liveliness' by way of machine-gun bullets and shelling, especially in the neighbourhood of the railways and junctions. No

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doubt this kind of work helped to keep everyone fit, and was alike necessary for the line-holding troops whose supplies had to be kept up and for the supporting troops who, without employment, would have become soft and less fit to take their own turn in the front line. Naturally enough, there was always some 'grousing' to be expected at some having to turn out at night while others could sleep the night through, but all had to take their turn. In the line it was curious to note how differently people were affected by trench life. Some were usually gloomy and depressed and hardly expected to finish the tour without getting knocked out. Others, on the other hand, would show a great access of cheerfulness, which would be observable on most occasions and in most circumstances.

The tour which started on the 9th of August and lasted ten days, was, for 'A' Company at any rate, an unfortunate one. In it commenced that tragic series of losses among the senior N.C.O.'s which will be remembered by many. On the 16th of August Sgt. Leedham was killed. Two days later Sgt. Downard was wounded and died shortly afterwards, and, in the course of a few weeks, Cpl. Topliss, Sgt. Cowie, and Coy. Sgt.-Major Scrivener were also killed. This was not by any means the end of the run of ill-luck, which continued for some months after. During this long tour there were frequent aeroplane fights, which provided almost daily thrills to the watchers in the trenches. There were the usual patrols, wiring parties, rifle grenade and trench mortar strafes, with the expected retaliation. We returned to Riez Bail-

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leul on the 19th of August, after being relieved by the 2/5th, and the chief feature of the next few days was rehearsals for a raid which 'B' Company were to undertake on the 24th, that company being now under the command of Mungle, Brock having taken over 'D' Company, replacing Lapham, who had gone sick. The final rehearsal was very realistic and included crawling through a gap in improvised wire entanglements after the explosion of a real 'Bangalore tube.'

The operation duly took place on the 24th, the 'Bangalore' being successfully exploded, and Gough arranging a tremendous rifle-grenade barrage which must have inspired terror in all the Huns anywhere near. Unhappily, the raiders were completely held up by very heavy machine-gun fire, and a number of casualties were sustained. Mungle did splendid work re-organizing his company and attempting a second entry, which, however, was held up in the same manner as the first. Mungle and Gough were both awarded the Military Cross for their good work on this night. These were the first M.C.s to be gained by combatant officers of the battalion. Sgt. Ray was also awarded the Military Medal for his splendid conduct during this raid.

On the 26th the battalion moved to Merville, where some re-arrangement of billets took place. The usual training programme went on with occasional route marches, and so on. Towards the end of August we were reinforced by five officers from the Artists' Rifles and Inns of Court O.T.C.:—Gibbins, Kitchin, Tonks, Walker and Whiteley. They were warmly welcomed

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and quickly made themselves at home in the companies to which they were posted. Detained by a short spell of sickness at the base depot, Stephens, one of the original party joined us two or three weeks later, on recovery.

The rest period came to an end on 3rd of September, when we marched to Laventie, had our midday meal by the roadside, and then continued the march by small sections, at intervals, to Red House, the left battalion headquarters, where guides from the 2/4th Royal Berkshires were picked up, who conducted the troops to their quarters in the Fauquissart sector. The principal communication trench was known as Picantin Avenue, from the name of the hamlet in which it commenced. Red House was within a mile of the front line, and it was possible for small quantities of transport to come thus far in daylight, owing to good cover in the shape of hedges, bushes, etc. Indeed, there were French civilians living only a hundred yards or so away. The sector was extremely quiet normally, and the extreme left was at a considerably greater distance from the German front line than we had been accustomed to find any portion of our line hitherto. On our left were the 5th Australian Division (relieved later by the New Zealand Division), whose trenches were absolute models of neatness and tidiness. The loss of Coy. Sgt.-Major Scrivener, who died on the 19th of September, has already been referred to. This was a severe blow, for a more popular and better-liked man would have been difficult to find. His successor, C.S.-M. Littlewood, held office for a very short time only, he, in his turn, being badly wounded in the

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jaw. C.S.-M. Hankins took over next, and he continued to hold this important position, which he filled with the highest degree of efficiency until the disbandment. Of the other Company Sergeant-Majors, C.S.-M. Harper was with us almost to the end, and, as related elsewhere, C.S.-M. Mead became Regimental Sergeant-Major in the spring of 1917, his place being taken by C.S.-M. Robinson, our physical and bayonet training expert. The last-named, however, was wounded just after his appointment, and 'C' Coy. was thereafter fortunate in having C.S.-M. Hutchinson until the break-up of the unit. C.S.-M. Holloway, of 'D' Coy. left to take up a commission, after a few months in France, and was succeeded by C.S.-M. Davis. Holloway was, unfortunately, killed shortly after obtaining his commission. After our disbandment Davis obtained a commission in the Indian Army and rose to the rank of Major.

Mention has been made of the draft of eight officers from the South Lancs. Reserve Battalion—Adams, Claydon, Hassal, Lloyd, McClure, Sloan, Rushforth and Watson. Sloan soon afterwards left us to take over from B. K. Parsons the command of the party engaged in wood-cutting in the Forest of Nieppe, B. K. rejoining the battalion on the 28th of July. Lloyd returned to England after a few weeks, and Rushforth went down sick about the same time.

From now until the 28th of October we passed through a ding-dong period of line-holding and support at Laventie, alternately relieving and being relieved by the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. The mono-

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tony of trench life was relieved to a large extent, as far as the officers were concerned, by games of bridge and selections on Kitchin's gramophone.Kitchin had a notable *penchant* for Wagner records, and we often wondered whether the strains reached as far as the Boche line during the quiet evening hours. Battalion headquarters at Red House was the scene of frequent games of bridge in the slack time of the day. The mess-room here was brightened by numerous clever sketches and pictures on the walls, the former executed by some master-hand during the earlier days of the war. At one time a Badminton set made its appearance, and several devotees had occasional games on a little patch of turf at one side of the house.

We soon began to find out things about the German lines in front of us. We were aware of two strongly fortified salients, known as the Wick salient and the Sugarloaf, which gave every suggestion of probable trouble. Aeroplane photographs confirmed this, and these showed many strong concrete dug-outs or shelters in many places. A number of these could be seen distinctly from the artillery O.P.'s, which to us always seemed so obviously O.P.'s that we wondered why the Boche tolerated them. Several of them consisted of square brick and concrete towers twenty or more feet in height, with a very obvious slit in front. Behind the enemy line the ground rose gradually to a height of about 130 feet, forming a noticeable feature in an otherwise very flat district. This was the well-known Aubers Ridge, the possession of which was of very great advantage to the enemy. On the

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summit and opposite our front were the ruins of Fromelles Station, and, further to the right, what was left of Aubers village.

The tours in this sector did not vary very much in length, being usually six days with a corresponding period in Laventie.

Towards the right of our sector the line turned off sharply at right angles. This point was known as 'Dead End,' or Red Lamp Corner, the latter name arising from the fact that a red lamp was lighted at night to show to the troops on our right the safety limit for rifle and machine-gun fire. Any encroachment to the left would have resulted in firing into the backs of the troops to the left of Red Lamp Corner.

Whiteley carried out a raid with men of 'D' Company on the 18th of October, but was not successful in getting prisoners. The same thing happened with a raid by 'C' Company under Gibbins and Stephens. This latter raid produced a Boche overcoat, but there were no enemy to be found in the trench. These experiences confirmed us in the opinion that during the night the enemy only held his front line by means of small detached posts at long intervals. Unless a raiding party happened to hit on a post they were not likely to secure a prisoner.

The Boche was very keen on sending over 'Minnies' into our line, more especially in the neighbourhood of Red Lamp Corner, where the lines were fairly close together. These were mostly sent over in the morning and were of such a destructive nature that the usual practice, on hearing the 'tang' as the 'Minnie' started, was to

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clear the troops from several bays each side of the point towards which the bomb was seen to be making its way. Its progress was always slow and noisy, and could easily be followed. It made a dull thud on impact, and the rending explosion after the time-fuse burnt through could be expected a second or two later. After a 'Minnie' strafe there was usually a fair amount of work necessary to repair parapets or clean out fire-bays. The retaliation meted out to the Boche was always of a deadly nature, consisting usually of a deluge of rifle grenades or Stokes-gun bombs.

Some of the officers who slept at Red House had the temerity to go upstairs to the first floor level, where were a number of wire beds on a sand-bagged floor. Overhead there was nothing to protect from hostile fire except the rafters and tiles—poor cover indeed, but probably as effective as some of the cranky front-line shelters with roofs of timber, corrugated iron and a few sand-bags. These shelters actually used to rock when a shell burst within fifty yards or so.

At Laventie, when in support, life was very pleasant. There was never any shelling, except on one occasion that will be remembered when one of the brigade bandsmen was wounded in the main street. A beautiful old garden was allotted for the use of the troops, and here, on most evenings during the summer and early autumn, the brigade band used to give performances. We could hear this band, by the way, in the front line, when the wind was in the right quarter, and so probably could the Boche in his front line, so close up was Laventie.

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'A' Company's officers' mess in the Mayor's house had an excellent arrangement with the Mayor's housekeeper, who, with one other ancient dame, kept the home fires burning in the absence of the Mayor, who had sought seclusion in safer zones 'for the duration,' only infrequently visiting the house, presumably with the object of paying wages, or attending to urgent municipal affairs. 'A' Company used to hand over their rations to Madame, who supplemented them to a considerable extent with agreeable oddments and used to turn out the most excellent French dishes, charging so much per head per week to cover all expenses—an arrangement which worked very well and permitted hospitality to guests from headquarters and other companies. There were quite a number of civilians always in Laventie, mostly women, but, of course, only a mere fraction of the normal population.

Evenings were spent playing bridge or censoring letters—that most abominable of duties—or listening to gramophones. Once or twice there were scratch concerts held in a large loft. At these concerts the leading spirits were Sgt. Drummer Tucker, Pioneer Sgt. Shale and Sgt. Ray, all of them artistes of considerable merit. As a comedian, Sgt. Tucker would have been hard to beat, and his ready wit, comic songs and stories kept us in fits of laughter. Tucker never changed; he was always to be relied on for creating an atmosphere of fun and good humour. In times of special gloom, more often than not it was Sgt. Tucker who would restore us to happiness and smiles once again. As leader of the drums he

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was responsible for the fine state of efficiency of the band, which was alike the pride of the battalion and the envy of other units. Sgt. Shale and his small band of pioneers who were so constantly called on for indispensable carpentering and other work, never failed. As an entertainer, Sgt. Shale was very valuable. His violin-playing was always keenly appreciated, and it was he, who, later on, organized the orchestra which was such a necessary part of the battalion concert party. Sgt. Ray was an extraordinarily versatile N.C.O. As Sgt.-Instructor in bombing, he was the last word in efficiency, and the way he handled bombs, fuses, grenades and other explosives, both British and foreign, was an example of fearlessness which no one in the battalion could equal. His services in organizing bombing-raids were invaluable. In the direction of sport Sgt. Ray was a very fine runner and won many a race at the sports meetings that were held from time to time. His pride in his battalion knew no limits, and was a fine example to others in this respect. At concerts his genius was also much in evidence, for Ray was an expert in ventriloquism, and many a time did his doll entertain us with life-like speech, song, and antic. This splendid man died of pneumonia following on influenza, contracted in 1918, while undergoing his cadet course for commission.

During the daytime the usual desultory training took place, varied occasionally by company close-order drill. On one occasion there was a demonstration with a captured German 'flammenwerfer," in the course of which several of us got our caps badly singed. On the 20th of

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October there was a demonstration of tear-gas bombs, arranged by Thom at the Divisional Bombing School at le Drumez, a hamlet close to Laventie on the la Gorgue road, Thom being now Divisional Bombing Officer. New sets of trench maps and aeroplane photographs, issued about this time, showed that the enemy had been busy digging new trench systems along the Aubers ridge, and we began to think that its capture, which we always expected some day to have to effect, would not be such an easy matter after all. However, in the morning of the 23rd October, we relieved the 2/5th in the usual sector, for the last time. Three days later there were signs of a change, when a number of London Scottish officers from the 56th Division were shown various points of interest in the sector. This was repeated on the following day, and on the 28th we were relieved by the London Scottish, in what, to the Boche, must have appeared a very noticeable fashion. In spite of warnings, the incoming battalion arrived in an almost continuous stream, with large quantities of transport, and pipes playing. Instead of unloading their limbers at Red House, as advised, they allowed them to proceed up the road towards the front line, as far as the sand-bag stops, nearly half a mile further, and there can be no doubt that the noise made by the springless waggons reached the Boche, for in the course of the relief a considerable amount of shelling took place.

The relief was duly completed, however, and we all got back to Laventie once more. At night-fall there was a very heavy strafe, and it was feared the enemy was

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about to attempt a raid on the new troops. Accordingly, Division required us to send up a company to support them during their first night, in case of trouble. This duty fell to 'D' Company. The London Scottish had a considerable number of casualties, but nothing in the shape of serious attack took place, although officers of 'D' Company stated that for 200 yards the front line was unrecognizable. At daylight 'D' Company were taken out and rejoined us at Laventie. Next day, the 29th of October, we bade farewell to Laventie and marched once again to Merville. That night we had a reunion of officers at the Hôtel de Ville, and an excellent dinner was enjoyed.

We had been in this district now for over four months, which must have been almost a record, and we were, for many reasons, sorry to go away. There were, of course, numerous incidents which could be mentioned and which would fill many pages, but I think enough has been said to give a fair idea of the kind of life we led during those four or five months. Reference should be made, however, to the occasion when the only low-flying Boche 'plane visited us. This occurred during one afternoon in late summer, at the time when most of the troops were resting as per instructions. The sentries were so interested at the unusual sight of a German aeroplane only a few yards in front of them and only a few yards above the ground, that they quite forgot to give warning, and by the time the news had spread and the rifles and Lewis-guns got to work, the Hun airman had finished his reconnaissance and was making off. The C.O. was

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extremely upset at our having failed to put the Boche 'plane 'in our basket,' and rightly so.

One ought perhaps to mention the awful mud which quickly developed as soon as wet weather arrived. The late summer and early autumn provided a good deal of rain, and tidy trenches at once became watercourses and slime-pits. Luckily the drying-up process was also rapid.

One remembers the last few weeks at Fauquissart mainly by the wonderful rifle-grenade activities of Prosser's gang, organized in collaboration with Gough, who had become Brigade Bombing Officer in succession to O'Brien, who was unhappily killed by the explosion of a filthy, defective Mills bomb. These rifle-grenade shows were a source of infinite delight to our troops, and doubtless of infinite annoyance to the Boche, judging by the number of times he was stung to retaliation. Usually, on taking over, we found things very peaceful, but on being relieved we invariably left for the incoming troops a legacy of Boche resentment and peevishness. This was the way in which we interpreted the order to maintain the offensive spirit and give the enemy no rest. In addition to the officer reinforcements already mentioned, we had absorbed several drafts of men, and on arrival back at Merville we were fairly strong in numbers. Some mention might be made of the battalion bicycles, a limited number of which were issued for the use of signallers for the purpose of message-carrying. They were, however, constantly being borrowed by officers and others, in their spare time, and used as a means of rapid locomotion from one place to another. The practice

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became so common at one period, that, on occasions, nearly all the bicycles were out at one time and an insufficient number left for carrying some important message. In consequence, there was a sudden sharp reminder as to the proper and legitimate uses of battalion bicycles and the forbidding of their use for any other purpose, except by special permission of the adjutant.

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CHAPTER V. THE SOUTHWARD TREK

WE spent three days at Merville, and on the morning of the 2nd of November marched back to l'Eclème, which, as fresh and inexperienced troops, we had left over five months previously. Our French hosts were pleased to see us back again, but we were only spending one night there, and on the following day started our long and interesting trek southwards. On leaving Merville, we were rejoined by a large number of men who had been temporarily attached to the mining sections, wood-cutting parties, Corps pigeon department and various other special formations to which men had had to be supplied from time to time. With the return of these detachments, on our passing out of the XI. Corps, the battalion received a large accession of strength, and platoons of the size of sections once more became something approaching normal size.

The first day's march was to Floringhem *via* Lillers. It should be mentioned that just before leaving Laventie we had several fresh Lewis-guns issued to us, together with appropriate, or, one ought to say, inappropriate, handcarts. The Lewis-guns had now been allotted to companies, but for convenience on the march were all put under the command of the Lewis-gun officer. On the first part of the trek he was to be seen in charge of, I think it was twelve, of these wretchedly-designed contrivances, containing guns, full establishment of ammunition, etc., each hand-cart being pulled along by its team of six or more men, who held on to long ropes

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attached to the sides, and to the T-shaped handle attached to the front. We brought up the rear of the battalion, and it was such hard work when pulling these heavy things uphill, that a gap in the line often developed and gave rise to undeserved rebukes. Eventually, spare horses or mules were allotted to assist the troops. In the first few days most of the handles snapped off, being attached to the carts by a particularly badly-designed device. How very grateful all the Lewis-gun *personnel* felt when these beastly things were finally withdrawn and limbered wagons issued in their place !

Floringhem was a nice clean prosperous village, with electric light and other advantages, close to the mining district of Auchel. We were well received, and would willingly have stayed several days, but this was not according to programme, for on the following morning, the 4th of November, we moved out to Marquay, a village in the St-Pol neighbourhood. This place was the exact antithesis of Floringhem, for the inhabitants were disobliging, would not sell us vegetables, and the billets were uncomfortable and the whole place filthy. Rats abounded, and it was here that the Battalion Post Corporal had his ear bitten by one during the night.

We were glad to make an early start next day for Séricourt, which was to be our next stopping place. The country hereabouts is extremely pretty, hilly and well-wooded and we soon got rid of the unpleasant taste of Marquay. At Séricourt we were mostly accommodated in a large château-farm and outbuildings in delightful surroundings. The village is near Frévent. The bright afternoon

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sunshine and the lovely autumn tints in the woods produced in all of us a most invigorating effect. I well remember climbing with several others to the top of a neighbouring hill and admiring the lovely view. How very peaceful it all was, and how distant and unreal the war seemed!

Speculation had, of course, been very rife as to our ultimate destination. Some thought the Somme, others were practically sure it was Egypt, others again favoured Salonika. There was no information of a definite character, however, for some days yet. We were not to remain longer than one night at Séricourt, and on the 6th of November had a pleasant march to Mézérolles, a fair-sized village, happily situated on the small river Authie, amid picturesque surroundings. So far, the daily journey had averaged about eight or nine miles, not excessive for troops who were in fairly good condition. The march discipline was good throughout, and the number of men falling out on account of bad feet, etc., was very small. On arrival at our billets after each move the first thing was, of course, a foot inspection, and, as soon afterwards as convenient, an inspection of cripples by the M.O. After the inspection of feet and billets, the rest of the afternoon and evening would be free for any form of rest or recreation desired. We were glad to make the acquaintance of Mézérolles, especially as the town of Doullens was only five miles away, where most things could be purchased that officers and men might be expected to require. There was a pause in our journeyings for nine days; the billets were good and the

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weather clear and frosty, so that everything conduced to good spirits. Specialist and other quiet training took place each morning, and the afternoons were, as usual, free. Those officers who could obtain (and ride) horses frequently rode into Doullens; others would walk, and passes were available for the men. A good meal could always be had at the Hôtel des Quatre Fils Aymon, and it was at the stables here that we always left our horses when visiting the town for any purpose. We spent one Sunday at Mézérolles. In the morning a church parade was ordered at which the Padre (Captain Bennett, M.C.) was expected to officiate. Not arriving, the C.O. decided to take the parade himself, following on a public 'strafing' of a delinquent from the transport lines. There was, however, no sermon! One morning was devoted to brigade manœuvres around the village of Frohen-le-Grand, and was pronounced a success.

Towards the end of our stay at Mézérolles there was a break in the frost and the roads became very muddy. This fact helped to make the march to Candas on the 15th of November more than a trifle tedious, and on arrival at our destination and finding that billeting had not yet been completed some of us felt a bit peevish. I have no doubt Tosland, the unhappy billeting officer, had found himself up against extraordinary difficulties, which, when explained to the C.O., however, smoothed matters over somewhat, but we all felt resentful against the Town-Major. Candas, it appeared, was a very large village which had been largely appropriated for some months by the Royal Flying Corps. Certainly they had

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annexed all the best billets and were scattered throughout the village instead of being confined to one quarter. Any unfortunate unit that had to spend a night at Candas had to get in where it could, with the small assistance the Town-Major felt called upon to give. Many of the billets allotted to us by that worthy were in occupation by the R.F.C., hence Tosland's difficulty. However, we all got in at last, after a good deal of searching and a certain amount of overcrowding. Here we first saw German prisoners in large numbers.

Next day there was a decided improvement in billets when, at the end of a morning's march, we arrived at Halloy, a decent, clean little Picardy village. I think several of us would not have objected to more than one night here, where we were more than usually comfortable. Our destination was still, to most of us, I believe, unknown. Hitherto, our general direction was southerly, and there had been a turn towards the west as we approached Halloy. That evening, however, a quantity of maps were delivered at battalion headquarters, which gave certain distinct notions as to what was intended for us. There was shooting to be had near Halloy, and the C.O. had an afternoon's sport, assisted by a few of the troops, who acted as beaters. One was a gamekeeper in civilian life, but the others, I believe, had had little or no previous experience of this kind, but enjoyed the fun nevertheless.

The 17th of November saw a sudden change of direction, and we now turned our faces towards the east. All doubts were at once cleared up; we were for the Somme!

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Although the great battle had commenced more than four months previously, we were aware that things were pretty warm there still. For even though operations on a very large scale were temporarily suspended, local fights were still occurring; for were not the 63rd (Naval) Division about to attack Beaumont-Hamel and Beaucourt, and had not the French recently seized Ablaincourt and Pressoire? Our own 184th Brigade, too, were in reserve in connection with the prospective attack above-mentioned. We might be sure, then, that we should not be likely to have an altogether dull time on arrival. The further east we progressed—and it was a very long march that day—the more we became certain of this. There was a lot more traffic on the roads, we could hear guns in the distance, and the mud began to increase considerably.

At last we arrived at Hérissart, late in the afternoon. What a disgusting place it was, and how utterly unlike the clean, civilized village we had left! We were getting near the real Somme mud, and there was an abundance of it at Hérissart. The roads were almost everywhere perfectly filthy, the billets were tumbledown and uncomfortable, and most of the civilians had left the place. An event occurred here which should be mentioned. This was the sudden demise of Shutt's ancient and much respected mule, 'Adam.' The exact age of this animal was not known, but extravagant claims were made in the transport lines. I do not know why he died; possibly it was the sight of the Hérissart mud. Near by was the great casualty clearing station at Puchevillers.

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The following day saw a considerably shorter march to Warloy-Baillon, a largish village on the Arras-Amiens road. Here we found traces of the 1/8th Battalion, who had evidently previously occupied billets in the village. As we marched down the main street we noticed, with approval, a well-stocked Expeditionary Force Canteen. An invasion took place later in the day.

Leave having opened by this time, Morton had left us at Hérissart, on the preceding day, for ten days in 'Blighty.' His duties as Adjutant were taken over by Farmer, and on his return Morton took over command of 'C' Company, Lefroy having, by that time, proceeded on a Senior Officers' Course. At Warloy, Mungle also secured his first leave, and after this, parties frequently went off, the allotment being generous and frequent. Billets were very poor at Warloy, but we managed fairly well in spite of overcrowding—five or six officers sleeping in a single room, mostly on the floor, the men being correspondingly cramped. That night there was an issue of rum for the first time, and the conditions prevailing at this stage were such as to make it very acceptable. A number of German prisoners passed through the village during our stay of three days here. During this period a good deal of useful work was put in in cleansing billets and sweeping roads. We were able to see a bit of the surrounding country, though this was not particularly inviting in appearance, owing to the combination of mud and November weather. The village of Senlis was the nearest of any interest, principally for the fact that the Corps Field Cashier was stationed here and was

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prepared to distribute notes to the tune of 125 francs per officer not more than three times monthly in exchange for a signature on a slip of paper. There was also a large German prison camp here, all the prisoners looking particularly well cared for.

On the 21st of November we moved to Bouzincourt, a village on the high ground west of Albert and the River Ancre. This place, in spite of its proximity to the old front line, was not so badly damaged as might have been expected, but many troops had been passing to and fro for many months, and the billets had a somewhat worn appearance. Captain V. C. W. Vickers joined us at Bouzincourt and was attached to the battalion for a time as M.O. A certain amount of training took place daily during our six days' sojourn at Bouzincourt, and the afternoons being free, permitted us to visit Albert and roam the surrounding country, if we wished, or play bridge or poker. The latter game was fast becoming the rage at headquarters. I think most of us must have taken a trip into Albert within forty-eight hours at most after our arrival at Bouzincourt. The town naturally presented a great deal of attraction for everyone, for had it not figured in the official communiqués right from the earliest days of the War? Then there was the leaning Madonna on the spire of the Basilica, which, from photographs, was already familiar to us. I remember my own first glimpse of the town as it came into view the other side of the Bouzincourt ridge. It was a bright, sunny November afternoon, such as we get sometimes in the late autumn. There was a slight haze rising from the

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Ancre marshes and partially obscuring the lower buildings of the town, but the spire of the cathedral, with its extraordinary leaning figure, held out, as it were, at an angle of 45 degrees with the vertical, dominated everything and was most impressive in its distinctness.

On the 27th of November the battalion moved to Hédauville, a village on the Albert-Doullens road, and to our disgust we were put under canvas in a sea of sticky mud. Efforts were at once made to improve the place, but although channels were cut in the mud to induce the water to drain off, there was little improvement possible owing to the depth of slime which was nearly knee-deep. We were in consequence not very comfortable during the five days we spent at Hédauville, and the nights were now getting very cold. This camp was much infested by rats of a particularly voracious kind. It is related by Tonks that, in one night, a one-pound packet of wax candles and a pair of his puttees were removed by these marauders from his immediate neighbourhood alone. However, a move came on the 2nd of December to Martinsart, a battered village not far from the old front line.

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CHAPTER VI. THE SOMME

AT Martinsart we were accommodated in huts in a small wooded valley through which ran a second-class road up to Bouzincourt. Like most of the second-class roads hereabouts at this time of the year it was shockingly cut up by the unaccustomed heavy traffic necessitated by an offensive action. Most of the original surface of the road mentioned had long since disappeared, and the road now consisted merely of a heavily-rutted track through chalk and mud. Lorries and cars embedded immovably up to the axles were a common sight.

At the bottom of the valley the conditions were slightly, but not much, better,as far as the road was concerned. The camp, however, was badly infested with rats, which were, of course, very active at night. The men's huts were of normal size, and braziers and fuel being plentifully supplied, they were tolerably comfortable when the rats left them alone. The officers were rather worse off, for their huts were of enormous size, in very bad condition, and consequently draughty and leaky. They were, moreover, impossible to warm thoroughly, in spite of, or probably because of, the piles of green timber we put on the large braziers. The green wood which had to be used, there being insufficient coal or coke to go round, naturally caused volumes of acrid smoke, which, needless to say, did not ease matters. Thus, bed was the warmest place, and many of us used to retire quite early, for the sake of comfort, after having

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spent an hour or two after mess crouching round a heatless and smoky fire. Retiring thus, earlier than customary, we went to sleep less readily, and were, in consequence, more fully aware of the nightly manœuvres of the brigade of rats which shared our huts. A hundred yards along the valley were a couple of nine-inch naval guns which had the unfortunate habit of firing off at intervals throughout the night with an ear-splitting noise, made all the louder by the enclosed nature of the locality with its tree-clad slopes.

Compensations appeared here, at Martinsart, in the shape of more than usually excellent parcels, for many of us, from home. The gramophones were much in requisition, too, and certain of our old records are, doubtless, closely associated for others, as they are certainly for me, with Martinsart. Later on we got used to the guns and the rats and the draughts, and other inconveniences of the nights, as good troops always do, however great the discomforts.

Let it not be supposed that we had nothing else to do but consider our situation and study the contents of our own and other people's parcels and listen to gramophones. There were daily working parties in ever-increasing numbers required, and there were days when practically the whole battalion were out unloading supplies from the railway trucks at the sidings at Aveluy, or making duck-boards and dipping them into mud for camouflage purposes, at the great R.E. depôt at Pioneer Road—a military road which had been constructed to link up Martinsart with a dead-end road from Aveluy, a

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large village standing above the river Ancre. This R.E. depôt was of enormous extent, and there were stores of all kinds in immense quantities: corrugated iron, 'baby elephants,' screw pickets, wire, barbed and not barbed, timber of all descriptions and sizes for the preparation of dug-out steps, walls and roofs, duck-boards, revetments, etc. There were saw-mills and sheds of all descriptions and the whole place was a hive of constant activity. The C.O. was able to work in a bit of shooting in the woods near by, and was assisted by his usual professional and unprofessional beaters.

At Martinsart we were the brigade in support, and our arrival there synchronized with the taking over by the 183rd Brigade, in the sector allotted to the division, astride the roads leading from Courcelette to Miraumont. Divisional headquarters was in a hut encampment alongside the road previously described in detail, running between Bouzincourt and Martinsart. Brigade headquarters in the line was at Mouquet Farm, near Thiepval, the farm at that time being chiefly recognized by a mound and a large twisted iron girder protruding therefrom at a fanciful angle.

A second battalion of the brigade in support was accommodated in poor billets in Martinsart village, and here also were our quartermaster's stores, transport lines and the baths. The other two battalions were in huts on the Pioneer Road. The transport section, of which Shutt was so justly proud, was without the smallest doubt a credit to the battalion, and easily led the way in smartness of turn-out and general efficiency, among the

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remaining units of the division; so, at least, we all believed, not without some justification. Who could help a feeling of considerable pride at the sparkle of burnished chain and stirrup, or the polish on the leather, or the healthy aspect of mule or draught-horse, on or off parade? In bad weather, when in the line, like every other unit's transport, animals and vehicles became sometimes unrecognizable, almost, in their coating of slime, But, as if by a magician's wand, a day or two out of the line, or a spell of fine weather, would bring back the lustre and smartness temporarily dimmed. No doubt the admirable reputation of the 2/8th Transport was largely due to the almost equal proportions of Hampshire and Warwickshire men forming the *personnel* of the section, each vying with the other to win for themselves the greater approbation, coupled with the energetic and altogether admirable handling of Transport-Sergeant Gardner. The quartermaster and his capable staff were, of necessity, the constant associates of the transport section, and if, in a new billeting area, there was any difficulty in locating the quartermaster's stores, one had only to listen for the voice of a mule, or look out for a member of the transport section, and one would soon be on the right track.

The 10th of December saw the 182nd Brigade move up two battalions into line, taking over from the 183rd Brigade, who moved back into the billets and huts vacated at Martinsart. The two supporting battalions of the line-holding brigade had accommodation consisting of two sets of Nissen huts covering a fair amount of space

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alongside the road to Ovillers la Boisselle running from Aveluy *via* 'Crucifix Corner.' These hut encampments were known as Marlborough and Wellington huts. Our battalion was located at Wellington Huts for five days.

Although officially in support to the 2/7th Battalion in the front line, we were a long way back, as we soon began to find out when fatigue parties were detailed to carry up stores of S.A.A., wiring materials, etc., to the line-holding unit. We had early warning of one specially dangerous spot in the near locality—Tulloch's Corner—a right-angled bend in the much-used road running through Ovillers-la-Boisselle. The enemy had the range of this point to a nicety, and plagued it, at frequent intervals, day and night, with long-range H.E. We were unfortunate enough to lose a valuable N.C.O., Sgt. Nicholls, of 'A' Coy., at this unhealthy spot, almost as soon as we arrived in the district and before our first tour in the line. Sgt. Nicholls added one more to the extraordinary series of N.C.O. casualties which it had been 'A' Coy's misfortune to sustain in a short space of time.

I remember an exhausting job I had one night. I was ordered to take a party of headquarter details—snipers, regimental police, etc., into the line as a working and carrying party. We left camp just before dark, wearing great-coats, and after picking up gum-boots en route, proceeded a long way to a dump known as 'Rifle Dump,' somewhere between Thiepval and Courcelette, where we had an appointment with Hawken of the 2/7th. From him we received a considerable quantity of screw

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pickets and barbed wire, an R.E. 'guide,' and the intimation that we were going to be led to Regina Trench, in front of which we were to do an hour's wiring with the materials we were carrying, and then return to our unit. It was a very black night and the country was perfectly strange to us. The guide was not very good and led us partly along often submerged D.B. tracks marked by tape, which sometimes showed up faintly, and partly along a most infernal trench about two feet deep with mud which varied from a thin, pea-soup consistency to one similar in stickiness to half-melted glue. Having lost us several times, he finally gave it up, and we eventually found our own way to Regina Trench, which was the official line of resistance. After a little difficulty we found troops, who directed us to the nearest Company Headquarters in 'Death Valley.' Vague information as to where the wiring work was required was available, and we had to use our own ideas as to wiring a trench which we had never seen in daylight, on a pitch-black night, the working party consisting of men who had never before done any wiring, and were already thoroughly aggrieved with the long and tedious journey and plastered up to the waist with slime. However, we made the best of a bad job, did our hour's wiring, found our own way back, and arrived in camp after daybreak, having had a difficult job to do after a long march, and having finished up with a similar march, making, in all, ten or eleven miles.

On another day several of us made a daylight visit to the Thiepval district, *via* Authuille, but found the spot

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none too healthy and returned almost at once, having quickly satisfied our curiosity. On the afternoon of the 15th of December the four Company Commanders, the 'specialist' officers and about sixteen men formed an advance party and proceeded to the line *via* Tulloch's Corner and Ovillers. Some of us knew the way fairly well by this time, having already visited the 2/7th headquarters. At Tulloch's Corner we picked up gum-boots from Gough, who was in charge of the dump, and went on *via* Mouquet Farm to the Battalion Headquarters on the Thiepval-Courcelette road, the latter at that time only barely discernible. Just before getting to Tulloch's Corner, always a lively spot day and night, as already mentioned, the leading group of officers and the men who were marching a few paces in advance of us, had a very narrow escape from being all blown to bits. A 5.9, or something perhaps heavier, suddenly soared just over our heads, and was actually seen by the rest of the officers behind. Luckily the road was on a slight embankment and the shell dropped just clear of the road and exploded. Having all thrown ourselves flat in the muddy road, we happily missed the flying fragments.

Arriving at the 2/7th headquarters, we dispersed to various points to commence prepartions for the relief. The battalion followed, after dark, and a satisfactory relief of the 2/7th was duly completed. The whole of the divisional area was, at this time, particularly slimy and sticky. The mud was everywhere, even on the staircases and floors of the dug-outs, and in some places was thigh-deep, and besides being dangerous—a false step might mean drowning—it smelt most abominably.

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Our dispositions consisted of two companies in the front line, furnishing posts in front of a broken trench-line known as Desire Trench, with two companies on the line of resistance, known as Regina Trench, the latter being well sited and giving splendid command over the slopes down to the River Ancre at Miraumont and Grandcourt. Headquarters was in a dug-out on the Thiepval-Courcelette road and the details occupied various fragments of trench and sundry dug-outs in the neighbourhood. Everything above ground was, as has already been described, just as sticky and beastly as could be imagined, but the dug-outs were for the most part snug and dry, apart from the wet stairs and floors. Drinking water was scarce and had to be brought up in petrol cans from the nearest water point out of the line —a distance of two or more miles. While in charge of one of these parties, McClure was wounded.

Ration-carrying was an arduous business, too, the sand-bags, etc., having to be carried a long way through the muddy wastes. Conditions in the firing-line were so damp and exacting that special efforts were made to supply at least one hot meal a day, and for that purpose hot food was prepared in the back areas and taken up in large 'containers' specially constructed to retain the heat for a considerable time. 'Tommy's Cookers,' consisting of small tins of solidified alcohol, were also an issue to the troops, and these were an inestimable boon to the men. Another 'issue' at this time was whale-oil, with which it was an order that all ranks should anoint their feet at least once daily, in order to guard against 'trench feet,' a disorder which was very painful and prevalent,

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and sometimes meant the loss of a toe or more, if not dealt with in time. Whale-oil was very unpleasant to the smell, but certainly worth the trouble of application to legs and feet.

Relief of the front-line posts was only possible during darkness, so that the troops occupying them by day had long periods of duty and could not be visited except during the night. The shell-holes they occupied were situated on the forward side of the last low ridge of ground falling away to the Ancre river, were full of water or slime, the men on duty having to wear thigh-boots without intermission. Movement was, in most cases, quite out of the question, so that the sentry's lot was anything but a happy one. About the left Company Headquarters the mud was very deep, being concentrated into a narrow sort of ravine, and it was only with difficulty and the utmost care that one could get along the track leading to the Company dug-out. A false step in the worst places might easily lead to complete engulfment in this vile-smelling, soupy slurry.

The enemy was active and very wideawake in this sector, although, seeing that the offensive was now at a temporary standstill, the shelling was less heavy than it had been, and not continuous. 'Death Valley' was the danger-spot, especially after dark, when it was 'searched' from end to end, at frequent intervals, with shrapnel and H.E. The craze for souvenirs became very strong at this time, and people often took great risks to secure some much-desired trophy in the shape of a rare Boche bomb or a 'pickelhaube' helmet. The battlefield was, of course, strewn with every kind of relic and weapon,

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British, French and German. Dawn was the favourite time for these souvenir-hunters, and even such an exalted personage as Major Phillips was frequently to be seen scouring the shell-holes, etc., for booty, on some clear frosty morning in the half-light.

On the 20th of December, after being relieved by the 2/5th Gloucesters, we proceeded to huts again at Martinsart, staying there for two days and then returning to Hédauville, where this time we were more fortunate in securing decent billets. I should mention, in connection with this first tour, one or two things we noticed. On the way to or from Tulloch's Corner we had to pass through the site of the village of Ovillers la Boisselle. Practically all that remained was a small fragment of red brickwork on which was fixed a board with the words 'Ovillers Church,' and a request to the souvenir-hunter or others tempted to remove portions of the fragment, to leave it alone, as it was an artillery aiming-mark! All along this road was to be seen vast quantities of heavy artillery. It was somewhat of an eye-opener to many of us who hitherto had seen nothing of the kind beyond the two big naval guns at Martinsart and a long range gun on the railway near Béthune. Going over the ridge of ground on which stood Mouquet Farm, it always seemed to us that the Divisional Artillery selected that especial moment for firing a few bursts. The guns being well down the rear slopes, this gave the effect of shells skimming just over our heads—a playful little trick on the part of the gunners, which no doubt was calculated to put both fear and admiration into the hearts of the infantry!

Then the landscape! Before the war this Somme

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wilderness must have been fine, broad, agricultural and pasture land, rolling in ample folds from the higher ridges down to the Somme and Ancre river valleys. Of course, we had expected desolation on our arrival, but nothing like what it turned out to be. Wherever there had been woods—and there had been many small copses, etc.—nothing remained but torn and blackened stumps. Of the villages, in most cases literally nothing remained. The broad, open country was everywhere churned up in the most unspeakable manner. Where the fighting had been heaviest and longest, one shell-hole only finished where another began. Some of these were so enormous that they would comfortably accommodate a pair-horse van.

Just before Christmas we had been joined, for a short period of forward area experience, by a Seaforth Highlander—Major Shiach—who had retired before the war and had rejoined. After having shared our muddy trench experiences on the Somme for a spell, and moved back, subsequently, to our 'rest' area, he was called to G.H.Q. and there given an appointment. Leave allotments came again at Hédauville, and some were lucky enough to get home for Christmas. The festive season was spent by the battalion in billets in Hédauville, and a very jolly time we managed to have. Ration Christmas puddings arrived in time, and the P.R.I. made arrangements for supplementary provender and beer, and the fact that we were out of the line and could get our Christmas parcels straightaway added much to the general gratification.

On the 27th of December a further party of us pro-

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ceeded on ten days' leave. We were quite delighted, needless to say, to bid good-bye to the slushy streets of Hédauville in the evening. We started out in limbered waggons for railhead at the small village of Acheux. As can be imagined, this is not the most comfortable mode of travelling by road, but we did not care about that, the distance not being more than three miles, and the men were quite glad not to have to hump their packs in the usual manner, for there was no leaving behind surplus kit when the soldier went on leave. Arriving at Acheux, we soon found that there would be some delay, and the information was passed round that a hospital train was off the rails a little way up the line. At length, after an annoyingly long period of waiting, livened up occasionally with a long-range Boche shell, the leave train started. Acheux was on a little single-track line running, in normal times, between Albert and Doullens. Being only a light railway, the curves were sharper and the gradients steeper than on an ordinary line carrying traffic of all kinds. The exigencies of war, however, brought this and many another light railway into daily use for heavy ammunition and supply trains, troop trains, etc., with occasional failures, like the one on this occasion. After several hours, and moving a few yards at a time, we at length arrived at the end of the light railway portion of our journey, at Candas. Our troubles, were not at an end however, for we were now ordered to walk up to the other station at Candas, where another wait ensued. By now, however, our impatience had settled down and we had begun to realize what 'going on leave' meant in this

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part of the world. Moreover, we were dog-tired, as most people would expect to be in the small hours of the morning. Once again we started, and after leaving Candas, there were no further changes, although there were innumerable stops, until we arrived at Boulogne, where we were soon on board and away from the harbour, bound for 'Blighty' after over seven months' active service.

Let us return to the battalion. The 30th of December saw a return to the Martinsart huts, and a week later a further move was made to a new hut encampment, known as Warwick Huts, situated alongside the Aveluy-Thiepval road, close to the first-named village. During all this time out of the line, of course, working parties had to be found constantly for all sorts of tasks, and few, if any, escaped a turn every few days.

Returning from leave on the 9th of January, 1917, in the late afternoon, I found that 'A' Company were preparing a special stunt which was to take place on the night of the 10th-11th of January. Sheets and blankets at home had softened me a bit, and having spent one night, sleepless, in the returning leave train, I now spent another on the hard wood floor of one of the Warwick Huts. This was followed by a third sleepless night in a dug-out in Fabeck Trench with Major Phillips, where we were in telephonic communication at frequent intervals with 'A' Company headquarters in the front line, where Whatmore was making the necessary preparations for his company's raid. The line was, at this time, occupied by the 2/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment,

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and 'A' Company, together with a number of picked battalion bombers under Prosser and Sgt. Ray, were instructed to go up to the front line and raid the enemy's positions and secure prisoners, the 2/6th Battalion co-operating with a similar operation in the adjoining sector. The scheme was carefully worked out, the jumping-off position marked out with broad white tape, the approaches to the objective—Grandcourt Trench—reconnoitred, rocket signals arranged—these under Mungle's control—and everything in readiness for zero hour. Artillery co-operation was to be provided by the 18th Divisional Artillery, who had just relieved our own gunners. The troops were in position at the correct time, and if the barrage had only come down in the right place, everything would have been perfect. Owing to some misunderstanding of instructions on the part of the gunners, the protective barrage fell behind our troops, instead of in front. They advanced, however, but before reaching the objective down came the enemy barrage in reply to ours, with the result that the raiders were entrapped between the two barrages. They extricated themselves with difficulty, suffering a number of casualties, among the wounded being Kitchin. On moving forward to take up the position, prior to the commencement of the raid, an enemy patrol of six men was encountered and captured, so that the principal object of the raid was achieved at the outset.

On the evening of the 11th of January the remainder of the battalion came up and took over from the 2/7th. The four days' tour which followed was uneventful; the

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mud and slush were, if anything, worse than ever, and in spite of gum-boots and whale-oil, a case of 'trench-foot' would crop up now and again. There was a fair amount of sickness prevalent at this time, and our strength was thus constantly diminishing. Walker had the misfortune to break his arm, thus adding to the number of officers who had become casualties or sick. Indeed, the roll of officers with the battalion was never lower, while in France, than at this period. We were relieved, after dark on the 15th, by the 6th Northamptonshire Battalion of the 18th (Service) Division, and there was, perhaps, slightly more than usual shrapnel activity on the part of the Boche, as we said good-bye to this sector. The battalion assembled at Crucifix Corner, near Aveluy, after the relief, and very welcome hot soup and coffee were served to all, under the able supervision of the quartermaster.

We next crossed the River Ancre into Aveluy village, where we boarded motor omnibuses and were whirled away to the pleasant village of Rubempré, where the last of us arrived towards daybreak, and found excellent billets awaiting us. What a treat it was to get a good, clean bed once again! We left Rubempré at about 11.30 a.m. on the 17th of January, and, after a rather uninteresting march, reached Candas, of none too pleasant memory, once again. As might be expected in this place, there was again rather a mess over the billets, those allotted to us being scattered all over the large village. Many were found already occupied. The usual Billeting officer, Tosland, being on leave, the unpleasant experi-

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ence of billeting a battalion in Candas fell to B. K. Parsons. It was not until after dark that the job was finished and I remember the headquarters mess had to be content with a small cold room with tiled floor and no furniture. The capable mess staff, however, soon got to work, found various boxes for duty as table and seats, and Corporal Foster, the mess cook, soon got a meal ready, which, though perhaps not up to the usual very high standard, was yet good in the circumstances.

The battalion was commanded at this time by Major Phillips, the C.O. having gone on leave shortly after Christmas. Our stay at Candas, happily, was of short duration, for on the following morning we marched to Cramont, a small and pleasant village, where the billets were good. We arrived early, the march having been started earlier than on the preceding day, and later we were rejoined by the C.O. returning from leave. The next day's march was shorter and brought us to Canchy, which was to be our stopping-place for nearly three weeks. The billets were reasonably good and we soon settled down and got quite comfortable. The weather, which had been wet and unpleasant for two or three days, improved, and a hard frost set in; so hard, indeed, that we used to wake up in the mornings to find our toothbrushes frozen to the mantelshelf, or to what other object they happened to be touching. For weeks on end the thermometer never rose above freezing-point, and was frequently showing twenty degrees of frost. Our moustaches would become stiff on our faces as we walked through the village street.

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Canchy was quite near the towns of Abbeville, St Riquier, and Crécy with its historic forest and battle-ground, and its fine memorials. A Headquarter 'B' Mess was formed here, consisting of the quartermaster, transport, signalling and Lewis-gun officers. We were joined by Claydon, who, about this time, I think it was, was made Assistant Transport Officer. The feature of 'B' mess was its evening meals, which usually took place at the café at the cross-roads, where the patron's charming daughter used to turn out remarkably good omelettes, as necessary. We also purchased a Pathé gramophone, jointly, at Abbeville, one day, at a cost of 140 francs, together with a fair selection of records. Needless to say, the machine was much in demand for many months until it and the records went the way of all gramophones and records during the war. Headquarters was in a large and well-furnished house on the main street. Here a considerable amount of entertaining was possible, and hardly a night passed without at least one guest at mess. The C.O., whose popularity with all units with which we came in regular contact, was so very marked, was always most hospitable and his invitations to dine were by no means limited to officers of high rank. A new officer, Phipps, joined us at Canchy, followed, a few days later, by Gilderthorpe, at Buigny.

The afternoons were free at Canchy, and Abbeville being only five miles away, was easily reached by horse or on foot, and, in consequence, frequently visited. Passes for the men were generously distributed, and many were frequently to be seen enjoying the amenities

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of the town. The mornings were devoted to the usual company and specialist training, with occasional route marches and 'schemes.' The brigade was now commanded by Brigadier-General Blacklock, who, from the moment of his arrival about this time, began to instil additional energy and *esprit de corps* into all ranks under his command. The B.G. was always 'about.' He believed in knowing all his officers and in telling them what he thought of them when necessity arose. He at once became very popular, especially when his personal interest in the life of the men showed itself. He was frequently present at the football matches, which he was anxious should be arranged between battalions and between companies, in order to encourage that useful spirit of friendly rivalry which was such an excellent thing in the Army.

A readjustment of the divisional billeting area necessitated our leaving Canchy on Monday, the 5th of February, to the regret of many of us. The move, however, was only a short one, and took us to the village of Buigny l'Abbé, about the same distance from Abbeville, but south-east of that place, Canchy lying to the north-east. We soon found that the change was not for the better, for the billets were much poorer, and the inhabitants not so friendly. The Maire himself was a most difficult person to manage. There were one or two notable exceptions, where the simple folk were extremely cordial, especially when they began to know us and found that the 2/8th Royal Warwickshires were a most well-behaved crowd. I rather fancy, from the appearance of

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Buigny l'Abbé, that the folk there had had some less well-behaved people to entertain, some time in the past.

I have said the billets were not good. Let me describe what I found allotted to myself. Having remained behind at Canchy to settle any claims for damage there might be, this being my usual job, I arrived at Buigny after the battalion had been housed. Eventually I found my billet—a room with a polished tile floor and only a scanty supply of straw on which to sleep at night. On turning in—the temperature was still well below freezing-point—I found it quite impossible to sleep, and was quickly chilled through. I envied the men with earth floors in their barns and stables. There was nothing for it but to get up and seek shelter with a friendly fellow-officer. There was no difficulty in this, needless to say, and I had no further trouble in this direction.

As usual, we settled down and made the best of things. The usual Lewis-gun, bombing and other specialist training continued, together with musketry, lectures and so forth. We had a 'flag barrage' practice attack one day. This consisted of movement over open country, in successive waves, behind an artillery barrage represented by signal flags being waved from side to side by members of the signal section, and making forward jumps, at stated intervals, to give the effect of the barrage being lifted. These practice attacks were becoming more and more frequent. The first, I think, took place at Hédauville in the previous December, and, as might be expected for a first show, was so unsatisfactory that it had to be done again.

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The cold weather continued for some time at Buigny, and then a thaw set in with muddy consequences. The various gramophones were much in demand during the long evenings, and the visits to Abbeville and the Tête de Boeuf Hotel, etc., continued, as opportunity occurred. Some will remember the difficulty in obtaining fuel at Buigny l'Abbé. The ration was small and quite insufficient for any other purpose beyond cooking, which, of course, came first. The villagers, many of whom had good stores of dry wood, were very reluctant to sell or give any to the troops. It was not surprising, therefore, to find that the troops occasionally helped themselves, and, in consequence, there were considerably higher claims to settle on our departure on February the 15th.

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CHAPTER VII. SOUTH OF THE SOMME

THE Battalion marched a short distance of four miles to the station at Pont Rémy, a village on the main line between Abbeville and Amiens. Here, in a short time, we entrained and proceeded, *via* Amiens, to the station at Marcelcave, on the Amiens-Laon line. Here we detrained and marched into the village and took over billets, which we found to be quite agreeable, and we were given a warm reception by the inhabitants. We found Marcelcave to be quite a pleasant village, with a rather attractive little 'place' surrounded with fine, well-trained trees. There were numerous military inscriptions in French to be seen, on the walls and doors of the houses, at the street-corners, etc., but none in English, the reason being that the British army was in course of taking over an additional stretch of line from the French, south of the River Somme.

The most noticeable landmark at Marcelcave was a large chimney-shaft, the top of which had been shot away by gun-fire some time earlier. This formed part of the sugar factory, and it could be seen many miles in all directions. A stay of four days at Marcelcave came to an end on the 19th of February, when we marched a short distance to the next village, known as Wiencourt l'Equipée. Here we took over a hut encampment known as Camp No. 102, which had just been vacated by French troops. The condition of this place was simply abominable, the whole ground having the appearance of one large morass. The huts were of the very large type gene-

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rally employed by the French, and although provided with numerous wire beds for the troops, were very difficult, on account of their roominess, to warm. On our way here we had passed an enormous R.E. dump on the main road, and on passing through the village we overtook a lengthy French artillery column, which hindered our progress, the local road being very narrow and sunken, and, owing to the heavy traffic which had been passing over it, its condition can better be imagined than described.

While at Camp No. 102 we were joined by Rogers and Peskett, fully-fledged officers who, a few months previously, had been with us as N.C.O.'s in 'C' Company. Not much training was possible here, owing to the state of the ground, and, in consequence, considerable time was given to lectures and indoor specialist instruction. I have a rather painful recollection of Camp No. 102, for a bad sardine which I consumed at tea one day produced a sharp attack of ptomaine poisoning. This reflects rather badly, I fear, on the catering in 'B' mess, which still enjoyed a partial existence. There were one or two jolly little dinners in the evenings at a picturesque old mill at Cayeux, a small village on the upper waters of the little river Luce, only a short distance away from camp. Here we were joined, at these functions, by the family resident at the mill, and they much enjoyed the gramophone selections and songs with which we entertained them, and gave us French songs in return.

Six days constituted the length of our stay at Camp No. 102, and our next move was a march to Framer-

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ville, a fair-sized village, close behind the original front line as it existed before the Franco-British Somme offensive of the previous summer. The division had now taken over a sector of front between Ablaincourt, in the north, and Chaulnes Wood, in the south. On the right was the 32nd Division and on the left the 59th, the latter recently arrived in France.

Divisional headquarters was at Harbonnières, a small town south-west of Framerville. Two of our companies were billeted in what had been a fine château, though it was now somewhat the worse for wear, having had one or two direct hits from the Boche guns. The remainder of the battalion was housed in the usual barns and private houses spread over the rest of the village. Billets were none too good, but we made the best of them, and soon developed a liking for Framerville, for, in spite of its somewhat battered condition, there were still a few French civilians left who were kind and good-natured, and the village was quite a pleasant one. Near by was an Expeditionary Force Canteen at Proyart, which, however, having only just been installed, was not yet replete with every requirement of the soldier.

On the 2nd of March several of us went up to the line and reconnoitred the trenches and the landscape generally, preparatory to taking over from the 2/7th, who had been in residence, so to speak, for a few days. We returned safely, in the afternoon, and proceeded with the necessary preparations.

On the following day a successful relief took place, and we found ourselves in possession of a muddy trench

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system just in advance of the one-time village of Ablaincourt. The route to the line was by way of Foucaucourt, and the remains of Déniécourt Château, where brigade headquarters was situated. There had been a local offensive here in the early winter, and the French had succeeded in getting possession of the villages of Ablaincourt and Pressoire, though the main object—the capture of the town of Chaulnes, with its important railway junction—had not been achieved, in spite of a brave attempt.

The front line trench in our sector was so deep and sticky in mud that it was inaccessible in daylight, and was occupied by small posts of men who could only be relieved or visited after dark, and overland. The wiring in front was very thick, and almost continuous, in places, with that of the Boche. There was good ground for thinking that there must have been some tacit understanding between the opposing forces while erecting their wire defences, the firing-lines being so close together. A fresh hobby of the Boche made itself at once apparent, on our taking over this sector, in the form of 'pineapple' throwing. The 'pineapple' was a light trench-mortar bomb with serrated surface which, from the close proximity of the trench systems, could be lobbed over with great accuracy into the desired portion of trench. This loving tribute was frequently sent over, and sometimes someone was caught unawares. The favourite targets were company headquarters, these being situated in dug-outs formerly in the enemy trench system, their locality being, therefore, well-known. At this time the 2/7th

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were short of Company Commanders, and, on application being made through the proper channels, Gibbins was selected from our battalion and took over this duty for a period.

The tour lasted five days and was, generally speaking, uneventful. Fresh opportunities for souvenir-hunters were given by the discovery of numerous French and German bombs, with which the ground was liberally strewn. We were relieved on the 8th of March by the 2/4th Gloucesters and returned to Framerville. Baths had been established in our absence, and we were all soon restored to comfort and cleanliness. There was a surprise visit one day at Framerville from Harper and Morris, who were doing duty with the 1/8th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment, the 48th Division being located a few miles to the north. Morris returned in a short time after an application had been made for his transfer back to his proper unit. He rejoined 'C' Company.

The usual routine now was working parties, interior economy and such company training as was possible. Some of the local roads were badly in need of repair, and a large party was required to patch up a certain road between Vauvillers and Harbonnières. The supervision of this work was given to me, having some knowledge of the kind of thing, and under the orders of the C.R.E. we perhaps made some improvement in the condition of the road, although material was not as plentiful as we could have wished. This was a welcome change from the usual daily tedium.

Another welcome change was provided in trips to

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Amiens, permission for which was granted at this time. A few civilian trains were running between Marcelcave and Amiens, and those who could borrow bicycles or had sufficient energy to walk to Marcelcave Station, were able readily to obtain leave. A fresh tour in the line commenced on the 15th of March, when we relieved the 2/1st Bucks Battalion in the right sector at Pressoire. The route followed to the line was *via* Rainecourt, Herleville and Vermandovillers. Brigade headquarters was at the last-named village, in a sumptuous white-enamelled dug-out.

In the Pressoire sector the conditions were very similar to those in the left or Ablaincourt sector, with the exception that movement in daylight in the more forward areas was even more risky, seeing that we were so much nearer to the high ground on which stood the town of Chaulnes. Further to the rear, a certain amount of cover was provided by an intervening hill which permitted more freedom and made it possible for relieving battalions to move over the greater part of the distance to the front line overland, thus effecting a great saving of time and giving better opportunities than usual for finding one's bearings. It is easy to recall the wonderful organizing ability of R.S.M. Davis, which was seen to such advantage during these two tours and the subsequent advance. Rations, water, mail, S.A.A., stores and supplies were sent out to the required spots with clock-work regularity from the battalion distributing centre, which he himself devised and superintended, and when the advance commenced the same methodical arrangements

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were made at every stopping place. What a tremendous asset to the battalion was the R.S.M.!

It quickly became apparent that the enemy had something in preparation. Just before we commenced this tour there had been a hostile raid on the 2/4th Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry in the left sector. We had also heard something of fires—big fires—having been seen well behind the enemy's lines. These were continued nightly after our taking over on the 15th of March. What did these things mean? It seemed probable that the Boche was about to move back to more comfortable quarters. This, if true, no doubt was the effect of the protracted Somme battle, which had created a very awkward salient in the German front in the neighbourhood of Gommecourt and Serre, in the north, and in the south also threatened the great Roye salient. Since we had left the Grandcourt area, our successors had helped things on a bit by taking possession of this village. We were, therefore, very much on the *qui vive* for the slightest sign of movement opposite our front.

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CHAPTER VIII. ENEMY RETREAT TO THE HINDENBURG LINE

ON the night of the 16th of March there were the usual Verey lights sent up at intervals, and the usual desultory bursts of machine-gun and rifle fire from time to time. There was nothing strange in this. The artillery fire was a little greater than usual, there was no doubt, but the curious thing about the hostile shelling was that it appeared to come from a greater distance than usual. Again the distant glow in the skies seemed to betoken the burning of villages or unwanted stores.

As the dawn approached, silence—the usual silence—settled down on both sides. It continued longer than usual, however, on the Boche side, and there was no 'morning hate.' Our front line posts began to sit up and take notice. They began to be venturesome, scaled the parapets, and cautiously approached the Boche wire. There was no sign from 'Jerry,' as the men called him. They went further and got into his front line. No Germans! How much cleaner his trenches were than ours!

Messages had, of course, long since flashed back over the telephone wires from Company to Battalion, from Battalion to Brigade, from Brigade to Division. Orders were quickly back to the front line companies to send out patrols, with all necessary caution, to examine the enemy's trenches. This had already been done, and there seemed no doubt about it. The enemy had gone, leaving practically nothing behind him which he could have

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taken. Everybody felt very brave all of a sudden, and there was a wonderful keenness for daylight patrols on every hand. The C.O. was quickly out reconnoitring with several other officers, including a gunner and a sapper. We got as far as Hyencourt-le-Grand, the nearest village in enemy territory, south-east of Pressoire and on the Chaulnes-Péronne railway.

We were well in front of the patrols sent out, and were suddenly reminded of the Boche's existence by a rifle shot which rang out and passed over our heads. This, together with the fact that our own artillery were dropping quantities of shrapnel on Chaulnes, now behind us, and might at any time lift on to the next village, reminded us that discretion is generally the better part of valour, and we withdrew to safety. Chaulnes had, of course, been evacuated hours before, and we were surprised that the news had not yet penetrated to the artillery of the division on our right—the 32nd.

There was a disposition to regard the war as finished, judging by the groups of men scattered over the countryside, exploring dug-outs and searching for souvenirs. One of the drummers found a German 'pickelhaube' and was wearing it proudly to the amusement of all and sundry. It was necessary, however, to remind all ranks that the war was not yet over by a long way, that the Boche might not be far off, and that there were such things as traps and ambushes still possible. Accordingly the leading companies formed a line of outposts, and thus we carried out our first open warfare manœuvre. Battalion Headquarters was moved forward into our old front

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line, and the rear companies and details proceeded to bridge over the various trenches and cut lanes through the wire, so as to enable our transport to bring up rations and stores as far as the old front line.

The silence during the day had been most uncanny. Only now and then a distant rumble or boom would notify the explosion of a mine at a cross-roads, or the destruction of an ammunition dump. Now a peaceful night followed and brought to an end what had been a notable day—the 17th of March, 1917. The following morning orders came through to advance our line to the railway, taking up a position between Marchélepot and Hyencourt-le-Grand, pushing out posts and patrols well in advance. This was quickly carried out, the distance being only about a mile-and-a-quarter. The railway, being in a cutting, made a splendid defence line, and we found it well-furnished with extensive dug-outs, each usually supplied with a second entrance. The enemy trench system, over which we were now passing, was very complex. There was line after line of continuous trench with subsidiary and connecting trenches, all thoroughly well wired, and each village through which we passed had been carefully prepared for defence, with strong points, machine-gun posts, wire and entrenchments. An amusing incident which might have had serious consequences, but happily did not, took place while we occupied the railway-cutting near Marchélepot (Marshalpop as the C.O. insisted on calling it). One of 'C' Company's Lewis-gun teams suddenly spotted some horsemen at about a thousand yards' range and opened fire. The

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horsemen quickly took cover, and we very soon had the warning, which, of course, should have been issued before, that detachments of King Edward's Horse were operating in front of us and were, for the time, attached to the division. We were soon to become used to seeing cavalry patrols, which up to this moment had been a most unusual sight.

A further advance took place on the morning of the 19th to the Somme valley, the river here running north and south. We occupied the village of Pargny, where we found that a few French civilians had been left behind by the retreating Germans. The bridges over the river and canal had, of course, been blown up, and it was impossible, for the present, to proceed any further until assistance could be rendered by the Royal Engineers. Accordingly the high ground overlooking the river was occupied by a chain of posts, with another at the approach to the old bridge. Sleeping accommodation, headquarters, etc., were found in dug-outs cut in the sides of the hills and in the banks of sunken roads which abounded hereabouts. Many of the dug-outs had been burnt out during the retreat, and the smell of burnt timber was very prevalent. The villages through which we had passed, so far, had all been destroyed; those near the old front lines, by our gun-fire, those further back by the retreating enemy. We were surprised, therefore, to find a number of comparatively sound buildings in Pargny. Here, too, we first saw a German cemetery. In a prominent position was a large figure made of concrete, representing, doubtless, the might of the Fatherland. It was a

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hideous erection, however, and evidently displeased the British troops, for, after a few days, the memorial was found smashed to atoms.

Warnings were given out to the troops to beware of booby-traps, a number of which had already been found in dug-outs and buildings. Being held up until bridges or pontoons could be thrown over the wide branches of the river and the canal, we had opportunities to explore the surrounding country a bit. Béthencourt, the next village upstream, we found only partly destroyed, and the church appeared to be intact. Later, it was used for a field ambulance, and, after a few weeks had elapsed, the whole building was blown up, with considerable loss of life, the gentlemanly Boche having left behind a delay-action mine. No comment is needed.

We found lying everywhere innumerable felled trees, particularly orchard trees, these latter having been cut down in sheer wantonness. There are obvious military advantages in blocking roads, and so on, by cutting down roadside trees, and in helping oneself to forest trees, but it is a little difficult to see the benefit to one side, or the disadvantage to one's enemy, in felling fruit trees.

An occupation for spare time, which appealed to some, consisted in exploding Mills bombs in the river and collecting the dead fish which rose to the surface. This practice was very soon forbidden. An unfortunate incident happened in 'A' Company's Headquarters one night. All the occupants of the dug-out were nearly suffocated with coal and coke fumes and were rescued in the early morning only just in time. The dug-out depended

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on door and windows for ventilation, and these had apparently been injudiciously closed during the night. The persons affected were discovered in a half-unconscious condition, and on being brought out into the open air, it was noticed that their faces had a curious bright pink tinge, as though they had been partly boiled. The fresh air gradually revived them, and matters soon resumed their usual aspect of cheerfulness at 'A' Company's Headquarters.

By the 21st of March some light temporary bridging of the various arms of the river and its canal had been carried out, and it was possible to get to the further shore and up into the village of Falvy, which most of us were very anxious to explore. We found it much more damaged than its neighbour across the river, Pargny; in fact, there was not a single sound house in the place. There were, however, a large number of cellars, some clear, others partly filled with rubbish. There had been many beautiful gardens and small orchards here, and the village must have been a charming one a few weeks before. Now, however, we found all the fruit-trees ruthlessly cut down, and gardens trampled down, in addition to all the other devastation on every hand. The weather having been very mild and fine for some time, spring was well forward, and the little patches of undamaged garden which we found here and there, were green with young bulb leaves, forget-me-nots, and many other plants. Some of the fruit-trees, too, although felled or sawn through, remained attached by a piece of bark or a thin portion of sapwood to their bases and appeared to be

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getting sufficient nourishment to enable them to break into leaf and blossom. By the 23rd of March a sufficient number of timber bridges and pontoons had been thrown across to enable the whole line to move forward. Accordingly the 2/8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment crossed the Somme and occupied Falvy and pushed out posts beyond the village. This was our first practical experience of throwing out 'bridge-heads,' the importance of which was explained to us with great pains by our new Brigade Commander, Brigadier-General Sir Charles Sackville-West. The village was at once put into a state of defence with wire and small strong points dug in the ground and occupied by Lewis-gun sections. About this time we had a reinforcement of officers in the shape of Gunter and Smith, while Morris and Slater rejoined.

Our billets were, of course, in the before-mentioned cellars, which required a good deal of cleansing and clearing before they were fit for habitation. A certain number of shacks were formed above-ground, out of the various wreckage found in the village, and these were occupied by those who could not find enough cellarage in their 'billeting area.' The warning about 'booby-traps' having been issued, we were, of course, constantly on the look-out for suspicious wires and unaccountable sounds, and almost daily, at first, expected to hear that someone's cellar and its complement of men had been blown sky-high. The Boche had, however, either not had the time or not had the inclination to interfere with the cellars of Falvy, and had contented himself with merely reducing its superstructures to helpless and unsightly

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ruin. One day, however, a suspicious noise was heard in the headquarters mess cellar. It was eventually located under the table, and cautious examination revealed the mechanism of a clock, which, however, was not attached to anything in the nature of a bomb or delay-action mine, and further investigation proved it to be merely a little joke of Major Phillips! Another invention of the latter officer was a strange contraption of the 'Heath-Robinson' type for wakening Farmer—always a rather heavy sleeper. Some of the items employed in this ingenious device were a spade, an orange, a fork, a pail of water, some string. There were others which I cannot remember. Sufficient to relate that, although the device was completed, and, I believe, even tested, Farmer would not agree to its being put into regular daily use.

Touch had not yet been established with the retiring enemy, and, accordingly, in the evening of the 27th of March, we moved a couple of miles forward and occupied the small ruined hamlet of Fourques, adjoining the much larger village of Athies, which had once enjoyed the possession of a station on the little light railway running between Péronne and Ham. Accommodation, in the shape of cellars, was very restricted, so that many had to use their native ingenuity and construct what they could in the nature of shelter above ground out of any material they could find, purloin or otherwise acquire. There had been no bathing facilities for some time, and necessity again proved the mother of invention when V. C. W. Vickers, now definitely 'one of us,' fashioned himself a bath out of a few pieces of wood and

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a ground-sheet. He even made it a little house for itself, and generously placed it at the disposal of any of the officers who cared to use it.

By the 28th of March—the day after our arrival at Fourques—touch had been gained with the enemy by our cavalry, beyond Poeuilly, about six miles E.N.E. of the first-named village. Preparations and orders were speedily got ready for the battalion to advance, on the 29th, to Poeuilly village, whence an attack was to be delivered on the tiny hamlet of Soyécourt, where the Boche had been definitely located, but in unknown strength. The 29th of March turned out extremely wet, but the battalion moved forward to the 'jumping-off' place in the afternoon, as per programme. On our arrival in the village we met officers of the 182nd Machine-gun Company, who informed us that the attack had been postponed on account of the rain, which was very heavy. This news was shortly afterwards confirmed by Brigade, and orders were received to return to Athies, the attack having been postponed until the day after.

I was unfortunate enough at this time to develop what was known variously as P.U.O. and trench fever —a form of influenza of a rather violent kind. I had fought against it for two or three days, but on the return to Athies I felt so sick that I had to give in, and on the 30th had to go into hospital for some days. Owing to the advance, there had been no opportunity yet for establishing field hospitals and casualty clearing stations in the newly-occupied area, and accordingly I found myself whisked back to the C.C.S. at Cayeux, thence to

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No.8 General Hospital at Rouen, whence I soon emerged, but was detained on light duty at the Base Depôt for a few more days. Anyone who has had any experience with infantry base depôts, and especially that at Rouen, knows how unpleasant these places can be, and I was very grateful when my request that I might rejoin my unit was granted.

Meanwhile, the stunt arranged for the 30th duly took place. Soyécourt was captured, together with a few prisoners, the place having been only lightly held. During the advance the signal section came in for some mild 'strafing' from the second-in-command for using a squeaky drum of signal wire. While the consolidation which followed the capture of Soyécourt was proceeding there was some desultory shelling of the village, and one unlucky shell caused severe casualties to Phipps' platoon of 'A' Company. Sgt. French and Pte. Barton, a first-class bomber, were among the killed.

Soyécourt being only a tiny hamlet at the best of times, and now being nothing but a small ruin, there was practically nil in the way of billets or shelter for the men, and once again all manner of queer contrivances had to be rigged up to give cover from the bad spell of weather which was in progress. MacKay, who had returned from base and put in a few more weeks' duty with us, now left us for the second time.

Sunday, the 1st of April, brought relief by the 2/1st Bucks. Battalion, and our battalion moved back to Tertry, a fair-sized village which had not entirely been destroyed. The billets were, in consequence, a great

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improvement on those of the previous few days. Much work was done at this time in filling in the huge craters at cross-roads, etc., caused by the land-mines blown up by the retreating Huns. These were very numerous, and some were big enough to hold a house or two. All ranks took a hand in this useful and urgent work, in order to get the roads ready again for regular use. In the meantime temporary sleeper roads had to be constructed around the outside of the craters. An event of note was the visit of the British Commander-in-Chief to the district, on Good Friday, the 6th of April, taking in our village of Tertry en route. There was nothing else of special note during these six days at Tertry, and on the 7th of April, at dusk, the battalion moved to the village of Villévêque. Prosser had the privilege of carrying out the preliminary arrangements and described the billets as 'fair,' a term which could easily be misunderstood by anyone not being well acquainted with this devastated area.

Next afternoon a German aeroplane was brought down and fell just outside Villévêque. The pilot, terribly mutilated, wore the Iron Cross, which was promptly annexed by Vickers, as a souvenir of special value.

The evenings, after dark, were long and, for the men, probably highly uninteresting. There were, as yet, no Y.M.C.A.'s, or recreation huts, or divisional concerts at which to spend their leisure hours. In consequence, there was a great deal of letter-writing—and censoring—taking place daily, and most of the fellows turned into 'bed' early, being the most comfortable and warmest place.

The stay at Villévêque was short—two days only, in

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fact—and on the 9th of April, the battalion took over the fair-sized village of Maissemy from the 2/6th Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the posts situated in advance thereof. This place had recently been captured by the 2/7th. The advance had now slowed down, and it appeared that the Boche was going to dispute seriously any further progress. Maissemy was within five miles of the city of St Quentin, the scene of important engagements in the early days of the war, and the former had not been taken without a strong fight. On our right the 32nd Division had had very heavy fighting at Savy Wood, which was only taken at the expense of considerable casualites.

The weather was bad, and a bitter wind brought snow to add to the discomforts of the troops holding the exposed forward posts. Those in reserve in the village were more or less comfortable in their cellars, ruined barns and rough shacks of corrugated iron, timber, and ground-sheets. The troops were not left long in one place, however, for, after another two days, they were relieved by the 23rd Manchesters, and, moving south-eastwards, spent one night at Villécholles and marched south, on the 12th, to the usual ruinous billets at Vaux and Etreillers, west of St Quentin, arriving in a heavy snowstorm.

The destruction of these two villages, separated by about a mile from one another, was as complete as anything yet seen, but hard work soon made them more habitable and in four days there was even a canteen for the men in being, the stores having been obtained at Nesle, a town of some size, which had been left practi-

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cally intact by the Boche, and still contained numerous French civilians. Although the half-battalion in Vaux was separated from the other half at Etreillers by about a a mile, one was within earshot of the other, as will be realized by the fact that, on one quiet evening, Tonks, taking the air, in his doorway, at Etreillers, distinctly heard Whatmore, at Vaux, calling his servant.

On the 16th of April Prosser did his famous ride to Nesle, accompanied by Tosland, to buy stores for the canteen, returning the same day. A journey of about twenty-five miles, this was a notable, though perhaps not wise, accomplishment, for one who was not too well used to riding, and, in his own words, on the following day, 'I was bad and spent the day in bed.'

A lamentable event which cast a deep gloom over everyone occurred on the 19th of April, when R.S.M. Davis, who had endeared himself to all ranks, was killed while returning from a reconnaissance of the sector we were about to take over. This was bad news for me on my return the same evening from Rouen.

In the evening of the 21st we marched rather a long distance to the line, which had now become established within about a mile of St Quentin. We relieved the 15th Highland Light Infantry, 35th Division, and were greeted, on our arrival, with a few salvoes of light stuff, causing casualties, including a platoon commander, Buckingham, who had only been with us a short while, wounded; L.-Cpl. Pearce, of 'D' Company killed, and a battalion runner slightly wounded.

The line, we found, ran on a curve, our left being near Cépy Farm, south-east of Fayet, in front of the Bois

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des Roses, across the old Roman road in full view of the barracks of St Quentin, and parallel with the fringe of the town to a small salient projecting from the south-west corner and known as the Rocourt Salient. The front line consisted of a string of isolated posts on the forward slope of high ground overlooking the town, which appeared to show no sign whatever of any life. Everywhere the German 'Hindenburg Line,' protected with enormous masses of dense rusty barbed wire, was in full view. There was, on our side, as yet, no continuous trench line and very little wire in front of the forward posts. Headquarters had several dug-outs in a bank about eight to ten feet high, forming part of one side of a shallow valley running parallel with the front line.

The mystery of St Quentin at once impressed itself on everyone. You could hardly move a yard without seeing the little turret on the roof of the cathedral, and, in most places, you could see the bulk of this massive building and many of the roofs of the houses. Prominent, too, were the Palais de Justice and the spire of St Martin's Church. Among all these signs of human habitation there never appeared to be the slightest indication of human life in the great town, and yet everyone felt that there were unseen eyes and powerful telescopes and binoculars on the watch for all movement within our lines. With such an advantageous observation post as the cathedral, which dominated everything, provided, the careful Boche could not have missed much that went on in daylight our side of 'no man's land.'

Nothing, so far, has been said about water in these

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districts. In their withdrawal the Huns had, naturally enough, fouled as many wells as they could, and, in consequence, water had to be conveyed great distances in order to keep units supplied. Some of the wells had been poisoned, many had been partly filled in or blocked; but the destruction had not been quite complete. Here and there a well would be discovered which provided perfectly good water, and these, after the usual precautions had been taken, were put to strenuous use. In the line at St Quentin two wells were discovered with pumps attached, fortunately, which provided for all our wants. One was near the Bois des Roses, the pump at which used to make a most infernal row when being used, and the other was on the old Roman road, which, being in full view of the Boche, and very far forward, could only be used at night with extreme caution. The Boche knew of its existence and would occasionally shell the neighbourhood.

The tour, lasting until the 24th of April, a very short one, was also very peaceful. It hardly seemed like war in these parts at all. Patrols used to go out nightly, but never met any of the enemy. They were too safe and comfortable behind their masses of barbed wire to have any need for patrols. There was very little machine-gun or rifle fire, and practically no Verey lights ever sent up from either side. We were duly relieved by the 2/6th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and moved back to Brigade Reserve at Savy village, where we found a fair supply of good cellars under the ruins. We were now becoming quite used to this kind of cave-dwelling exist-

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ence, and it really is surprising how fond one may become of a particular cellar or hole in the face of an earth-bank.

Getting used to Savy, we were invited to relieve the 2/7th in the support trench known as the Brown Line, on the 27th of April. Having decided not to attack the Boche in his new and strongly-fortified positions, it had become necessary for us to dig in and make ourselves as comfortable as possible for the business of looking at our enemy's position and having ours looked at by him, for however long it was determined by the Higher Command that we should do so. Accordingly a line of resistance, known as the Brown Line, was determined upon, this following the curve of high ground running from Fayet in the north, in front of Francilly-Selency to Dallon on the St. Quentin Canal, and including the commanding eminence now known as Manchester Hill, which afterwards became very famous as a strong point.

We found, on relieving the 2/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, that considerable work had already been done on this trench system, and it was our duty to carry forward this work with special attention to wiring. There were as yet no dug-outs, and these were considered to be of secondary importance compared with the necessity of getting a continuous and well-wired trench line in being at the earliest possible moment. Shelter from the weather had, then, to be improvised from ground sheets, corrugated iron, and anything that happened to be about. On our right we were in touch with the French near the Epine de Dallon, and our men

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soon became very friendly with their neighbours and had pleasure in sampling their wine, &c., doubtless giving in exchange some of their own excellent tinned beef or 'Maconochie' M. & V. rations. Good work was done during these days, especially on wiring, and there was strong competition among the Companies and Headquarters for the best and most plentiful wiring. The observation over the country in front of us was splendid, and gave an excellent field of fire, but even here one could see at almost every point that dominating mass of the Cathedral, or rather, Collegiate Church, to give it its proper name, of St Quentin.

We were in support to the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, who occupied the forward area which we had first occupied on taking over from the 35th Division. The weather had improved, and was now beautifully spring-like, and trees and woods (what was left of them) were bursting forth into leaf, as were the birds into almost ceaseless song. These were indeed halcyon days, and all who were there must look back with real pleasure to our first few tours in the St Quentin district. Headquarters was in a sort of cave cut in the face of the railway cutting passing through Savy Wood, and on the wrong side of the cutting by the way. The battalion reserve was also disposed along the railway line.

On the 3rd of May we took over from the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment in the outpost line, during the evening. The relief was carried out without hitch and in short time. In the evening of the following day,

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to everyone's profound regret, Morton was killed by a chance 'pip-squeak' while on his way to inspect his posts. Coy. Sgt.-Major Robinson also was wounded. Morton was very popular and much beloved, and his loss was most keenly felt by all who knew him. Quiet, unobtrusive, efficient, imperturbable, at the same time sympathetic and ever solicitous of the welfare of all those under his command, Morton held a very high place in everyone's regard. He was essentially a part of the 2/8th, and his loss left a blank in our lives which was never filled. He was a white man, and a soldier, if ever there was one. This unhappy event put a damper on the rest of the tour. The command of 'C' Company was taken over by Morris temporarily, although owing to the injuries he had received in the bombing accident, his eyesight was becoming so impaired that it seemed improbable that he would be able to remain on service much longer. There were officer reinforcements during this tour—Bevan, Llewellyn and Lloyd.

In the earlier days in France the Band was not taken into the line and the necessary quota of Battalion and Company 'Runners' was provided either by the signal section or by men specially detached for the purpose from the companies. After the first few months in the north, however, when casualties began to be more frequent and the strength of the battalion smaller, it became necessary for the 'Drums' to do their turn of duty in the line, and while so engaged they became 'runners'. What splendid messengers, too, they were! How untiring and how zealous! In fact they were only rivalled by

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'A' Company's special corps of 'guides,' of whom that Company was so justly proud. Too much could not be said in praise of these Battalion runners, who were always ready, in fair weather or foul, in quiet times or under heavy-shell fire, to carry messages to the front-line Companies or wherever they were required to go—Busby or Chambers, Devey or Rudge, Croshaw or any one of the others no less meritorious. In the peaceful days near St Quentin, one of the runners blossomed forth as a poet, and one recalls a pathetic little ballad about the hardships and trials of the poor runner, emanating from the pen of Drummer Rudge. An ever-popular member of the indefatigable corps of runners was 'Darkie' Irons, a coloured lad who came to us with a small draft, at Laventie. Darkie was never seen without a smile or a grin, and his cheery disposition must often have put heart into his fellow-sufferers. Then the signal section, whose days and nights were often so long and tedious, would give place to none, and there can be no doubt that their efficiency was remarkably high. Out of the line, under the able guidance and instruction of Tosland, with Sgt. Paxford and Corporal Worrall, additional men from the Companies were constantly being trained to replace casualties and to form a reserve to be called on in time of stress. They were a loyal band these signallers, who would tumble out, at a word, during their legitimate rest hours, to mend a broken line, or take an extra turn at the buzzer and look, at any rate, as though they enjoyed it.

It has not been mentioned that our Transport Lines

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and Q. M. Stores had been established in Villéveque, and it was found possible to bring rations, stores and mails to the door, so to speak, when the battalion was in the line. This was effected by turning the mules into pack animals, the packs consisting of sand-bags containing the rations, etc., tied together and slung across the mules' backs. Nightly, at dusk, might be dimly seen on the skyline, Shutt, Hodgkins and a train of mules and personnel, as they approached from the direction of Holnon.

We were relieved by the 2/6th on the 6th of May, and moved back to Savy village, where our cellar-mouths gaped welcome to us on our return 'home' after nearly a fortnight's absence. During the three days that followed there were no special incidents to record, and on the 9th we again 'took over' the Brown Line, remaining there for five days with the usual trench and wire improvement work to keep us occupied, the calmness of it all only being occasionally disturbed by a few shells sent over by one side or the other, or by occasional activity from the batteries of French 75's on our right.

On the 14th of May, to everyone's surprise, we were relieved by a French battalion, and found that the sector was being handed over to the French. This, no doubt, was due to the extensive operations in progress in the north at Arras and in preparation in Flanders, requiring the accumulation of reserves. The battalion marched back by companies to Germaine, where, after a long and tiring march, we arrived in the small hours of the morning and found tolerably good billets waiting for us in a

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village which had not entirely been wiped out. We had a good day's rest and clean-up here, and on the 16th left for the town of Nesle, which, as has been mentioned, was left untouched by the Boche and still housed many civilians. Here we found most excellent billets. There were shops, too, and things to purchase. There was a good little restaurant, too, where that evening fourteen officers sat down to dine and say farewell to Morris, who was now definitely leaving us and returning to England on account of his weakening eyesight.

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CHAPTER IX. SUMMER MONTHS OF 1917

THE following morning we left Nesle (much too soon, some of us thought),and entrained at 6 a.m. for Longueau, near Amiens. The French railway people had been working hard, and had already got a large portion of this line, which ran from Amiens to Laon, into working order. Previous to the German withdrawal, troop trains had not proceeded further east than Marcelcave. The line was soon running as far as Ham by daylight. We found it very interesting to pass by rail through the areas which, until recently, had been in enemy hands, and across the old 'no man's land,' with all its devastation.

After detraining at Longueau, we marched through suburbs of Amiens, turning northwards on reaching the city, and making for our destination of Flesselles, which we reached during the afternoon after a rather strenuous day. We found Flesselles to be a large and pleasant village and the billets were good; so that our sojourn, which lasted until the 21st,was altogether agreeable. A notable event, during this period, was the presentation of the Victoria Cross to a Company-Sergeant-Major of the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry—the first to be gained in the Division. The next move was through a very picturesque country of wooded hills and valleys, to the village of Longuevillette, due north of Flesselles, and about four miles south-west of the town of Doullens, which we already knew quite well. By this time, of course, we were very far distant from the sound of guns and the numer-

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ous discomforts of trench warfare, and we were once again, after a long interval, enjoying many of the privileges and amenities of civilization in country pleasant to look upon and unspoiled by the touch of the heavy-handed Hun.

The day after our arrival at Longuevillette there was a Brigade Commander's Inspection. The battalion was formed up in a meadow and inspected by companies. The General's method, so we found, was to walk along the ranks of a company, and view the men's general turn-out, buttons, badges, whiskers (if any), etc., and then pass on to the next company for the same purpose, while the first company produced its iron rations, or its field dressings, or its quota of ammunition which each man had to deposit in front of him on the ground, the General returning to inspect this in detail while the second company got ready its mess-tins, or some other article of kit in which a deficiency or two might be anticipated. Now there were deficiencies in our battalion, as in every other battalion that ever carried packs or sloped rifles, but by a little skilful manœuvring on the part of company commanders, platoon commanders, company sergeant-majors and others, all deficiencies in the particular article being inspected were temporarily made good for one company by another, and the Brigadier, free from all suspicion, as far as one could see, found that each man was complete in the particular article inspected. The General was most pleased and complimentary, and those who were 'in the know' enjoyed the incident hugely.

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An interesting afternoon was provided by the Light Trench-mortar people at Gézaincourt, near Doullens, where, in a deep valley, a display of the powers of the Stokes gun, so much improved by the use of 'ballistite rings,' was given. This display was most instructive and our admiration and respect for this wonderful trench weapon were increased greatly.

Our sojourn at Longuevillette lasted two days, at the end of which we marched, *via* Doullens, to the village of Ivergny, nearly five miles south-east of the small town of Frévent, so well known to most of the British Expeditionary Force. The march was, perhaps, a trifle longer than usual, and the weather being warmish we were not sorry to arrive at our temporary resting-place. Billets were again quite satisfactory, but there was nothing specially memorable at Ivergny.

The following morning Farmer went on leave, handing over the Adjutant's duties to myself for a brief spell. We now moved on by motor-'buses in the direction of Arras, debussing at a point on the Arras-Doullens road known as le Bac du Sud. Thence we marched a short distance to billets in the village of Berneville. The whole brigade was concentrated in and around this village, so that there were not enough billets to go round. Our officers, therefore, had to be content to reside in huts, which were tolerably comfortable,although we had been somewhat spoilt, during recent days, by civilian sheets and bedsteads. We had ample time to get accustomed again to wire beds and wooden huts, however, for, arriving on the 24th of May, we remained at Berneville

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until the 1st of June. During this period we were joined by Wooldridge, Jessop and Scott, and the Battalion Concert Party, known as the 'Black Square Circle,' was successfully started by the Quartermaster, ably assisted by Sergeant-Drummer Tucker and Sergeant Shale. This institution at once became very popular, and kept up its good reputation right up to the end.

There was a good deal of training done at Berneville, including battalion practice attacks with 'flag barrages.' On the 31st of May there was a brigade practice attack with tanks, aeroplane co-operation and mock artillery barrage, with a great deal of noise. This took place over the old British and German trenches in the neighbourhood of Wailly and Ficheux, and was very realistic—up to a point. The first 'attack' was not considered good enough, and a second was carried out with more success. Not having worked with tanks and aeroplanes, directly, before this, probably there was some lack of concentration at first on the part of the infantry. After this, a gas cloud had to be passed through, with box respirators on, of course, following on a short lecture by the Divisional Gas Officer. The chief thing one always noticed, after walking through these gas clouds, was the awful condition of one's brass buttons, buckles, etc., which assumed a dirty dark green colour, and required a lot of cleaning to get back to their normal brilliance.

On the 1st of June the brigade marched to Arras, where our N.C.O.'s and men were quartered in Schramm Barracks, the officers having billets in good private houses. Billeting was carried out by Gilderthorpe. We

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found there were hardly any French civilians living in the city, the great majority of these having been evacuated prior to the important offensive which had commenced on this portion of the front early in April. There was considerable artillery activity still, although the offensive had now come to an end, and, in addition, there was a good deal of bomb-dropping, by night, on the city. On several occasions the Boche got uncomfortably near some of our billets, but there were cellars to most of the houses, and there was nothing but wisdom in taking cover therein during air-raids.

We were now to lose Prosser, for a time. He had become very famous as a bombing expert, and, as so often happened when a battalion had a highly efficient officer, he was 'sent for.' His destination was the Sixth Corps School of Instruction at Givenchy-le-Noble, where he was given the job of a bombing instructor. While at Arras the battalion was inoculated again and many were also re-vaccinated. Farmer returned from leave on the 7th of June, and resumed the adjutancy.

Preliminary notice was circulated that the brigade would take over the 'Wancourt Line'—a German trench system which had been captured during the offensive, situated on the south side of the Arras-Cambrai road, about five miles east of the city, and now forming the British support area. The notice, however, was, for some reason, countermanded, and, instead, orders were issued for a move to Duisans, on the west side of the city, and not far from Berneville, which we had recently vacated. At Duisans the battalion was accommodated in a hut

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encampment, remaining there from the 10th of June until nearly a fortnight later. There was no occurrence of any note during this time, and the usual routine of company and specialist training, with occasional battalion parades, took place during the earlier part of the day, followed by visits to Arras and the various 'shows' and concert parties, or to our own Black Square Circle, in the evenings. There was, however, a battalion football match, in which the C.O. played centre forward. Rumour has it that he scored a somewhat easy goal, the defending backs and goal-keeper being afraid of possible consequences should they impede the progress of the ball.

Leaving Duisans on the 22nd we moved back a long distance by motor-lorry. The journey, on a beautiful day, through most enjoyable scenery and through villages unmarred by the ravages of war, was almost regretfully terminated near Fontaine l'Etalon, a short march bringing us to the village, where we found excellent billets. On investigation we found that we were in the middle of the beautiful hilly country lying between the towns of Auxi-le-Château and Hesdin, rather nearer the latter town than the former, with the other battalions of the brigade in neighbouring villages, and brigade headquarters at Wail, on the main road from Hesdin to Frévent. The division was now in 'G.H.Q. Reserve,' and, later, we discovered that we were held in readiness to be sent up to the Ypres 'show' which was due to take place some time in June.

Fontaine, where we were to have a prolonged stay,

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was a delightful spot. There was nothing specially remarkable about the village, which was similar in appearance to many others in this part of Northern France. But the whole of the country was so quietly beautiful, so peaceful and restful, that one could not but enjoy every moment of it. Then, too, it was very suitable for training of every kind. There were plenty of wide, open and undulating spaces for battalion manœuvres; there were high banks, here and there, forming excellent natural butts for rifle and Lewis-gun firing practice; and towards Wail there was sufficient space for brigade practice attacks, and so forth. Our men were happy in their billets, and so, I have no doubt, were the officers. Battalion headquarters and mess were in a delightful château, built of stone, in a modern style, and situated in a most beautiful, natural park. There was accommodation for a few officers in the château itself, the only occupants of which were an old lady, the owner's mother, and one or two domestics, the owner being temporarily resident at some distance, and only rarely paying visits to his domain at Fontaine l'Etalon. The remainder of the officers found sleeping apartments, either at the lodge at the main entrance, or in various houses in the village. Corporal Foster, the headquarters mess cook, could not have wished for better kitchen accommodation, and was able to exercise his splendid skill in the culinary arts to notable advantage.

Shortly after our arrival here, the Signal Section committed an indiscretion. Tosland, returning from leave, thought it would be very useful to have direct telephone

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communication with brigade headquarters, four-and-a-half miles away, at Wail, and having accumulated an immense stock of wire, proceeded to run his line through without notifying or asking approval from brigade. When the line was complete and in working order, to Tosland's astonishment brigade intimated that they were displeased, and ordered that the line should not be used for messages from battalion to brigade. They reserved the right, however, of using it themselves, if they so required.

We spent, altogether, nearly five happy weeks at Fontaine l'Étalon, during which the usual programme was training of various kinds during the mornings, with the rest of the day free to do as we wished—to explore the neighbouring villages, bask in the sun on the hills, ride into Hesdin or Auxi-le-Château or elsewhere, or whatever else took our fancy. Hesdin was a favourite objective, especially if one could make an early start and get there in time for lunch at the remarkably good, though rather small, hotel. Then there was the famous Divisional Race Meeting at Willeman on the 17th of July, to which everyone went who could go. The battalion secured a number of prizes, and those who backed 'John Willie,' ridden by the Quartermaster in one of the races, reaped the good harvest indicated by the 'totalisator,' which had been set up for the occasion. The meeting was a great success, much more so than the similar function which had taken place in the previous summer at Estaires.

By this time Major Phillips had secured leave to

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Canada, and during the first part of his absence Whatmore became, temporarily, second-in-command. He, however, had been nominated for a Senior Officers' Course at Aldershot, and shortly afterwards left for England. He, in turn, was succeeded as temporary second-in-command by Mungle. During over a year's active service there had, of course, been numerous changes in the command of companies, etc. Some have already been mentioned. In addition, Lefroy had been appointed second-in-command to the 2/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and Lapham had been transferred to a Road Construction Company. Three promotions in the 8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment had recently been notified, and Shutt and the brothers Parsons suddenly found themselves 'pukka' captains. Some harmless 'leg-pulling' was indulged in, and Shutt, to his consternation, was informed that he would have to give up mules and take command of a company. Our company commanders were now, 'A' Gibbins, 'B' Tonks, 'C' Slater, and 'D' B. K. Parsons. A Battalion Sports Officer had been appointed, the duties being allotted to S. E. Parsons.

A French photographer was discovered in Hesdin, who took some successful portraits and groups of two or three of us. When the finished photographs were received, they were found to be so satisfactory that the photographer was asked to come over to Fontaine and take numerous pictures of the battalion, the companies, the signallers, various individual officers, groups of officers' mounts, and a very successful and picturesque view of the château. An opportunity for photographing

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the battalion as a whole occurred one afternoon when a lecture on *esprit de corps* was being ably delivered to an appreciative audience by Wooldridge. This lecture was arranged in accordance with divisional instructions, and formed part of the preparation before our introduction to the now approaching offensive in the Ypres salient. Listening to the lecture, the battalion reclined in various attitudes of ease on the beautiful, soft, grassy slopes which seemed to have been made for the purpose of open-air lectures or pastoral plays, in a sheltered corner of the château grounds. Here, a stage had been rigged up by the 'Frolics'—the Divisional Concert party—who had given one or two most enjoyable open-air shows here, the grass-covered slopes forming a half-circle from which everyone obtained an excellent view of the performance and splendid hearing. In the background were numerous saplings and trees, which completed the picturesque setting of this natural theatre. The photographs, taken during the course of the lecture, were highly successful, and are much prized by those having copies. We were also visited by a travelling cinema on one occasion, this also operating in the same beautiful surroundings.

The C.O. issued an order that all officers should provide themselves with shorts of khaki drill, and wear them on all occasions during the day unless otherwise ordered. We were glad of this, for it afforded a means of keeping a little cooler in the really hot weather which had set in. We were joined during this period by Captain Donald Mackintosh—Nonconformist Chaplain—

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who became attached to the 2/8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment 'for rations and discipline.' He very quickly became hail-fellow-well-met with all ranks, and was immediately 'one of us.'

In the nature of things we could not expect to bask in the sunshine at Fontaine l'Etalon 'for the duration,' but, although five weeks was a very long period for any division to be out of the line or in any one place, yet we actually stayed for this length at Fontaine. We appeared to be suddenly remembered, however, and these halcyon days came rather abruptly to a close, a week after the race meeting—on the 24th of July, to be precise. We marched out, rather reluctantly, let us confess, and made for the large village of Bonnières, where we spent one night. The following day a short march brought us to Frévent station, where we entrained for a destination in the north. The 'Third Battle of Ypres,' postponed for some weeks, was now about to open, and we were 'for it.'

The train journey was long and tedious, as most troop train journeys are apt to be. We passed Chocques as the dusk set in, then jolted on to Hazebrouck, and in the middle of the night detrained at a point some distance west of Cassel. Then followed what seemed a longish march to the village of Rubrouck. A billeting party had come on in advance, and we learned that the new billets were scattered over a very extensive area, and were none too good. When we were able to see our surroundings in daylight, and consult our maps, we found that we were in the extreme north of France, not far from the

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Belgian frontier. The civilians were Flemish, and spoke that language principally, although French was also spoken. The country was almost, but not quite, as flat as a billiard table. There was a very gentle slope down to the River Yser, which ran not far from the northern end of our billeting area. Brigade was at Rubrouck village and Division at the neighbouring small town of Zeggers-Cappel, about four miles away. In the near south-east rose the lofty hill at the summit of which stood the town of Cassel. Further to the east could be clearly seen the Mont des Cats, surmounted by its monastery, and yet beyond, the continuation of these hills to Mont Kemmel. An interesting little town, Esquelbecq, possessing a fine mediæval château, was within easy reach, but apart from the places named, there was not a great deal of local interest.

Unfortunately, the heavy wet weather, which so many will always remember in connection with late July and early August, 1917, set in shortly after our arrival, and, although there were a few bright intervals, nothing much could be done in the way of serious training after the first few days. We had to carry out a number of practice attacks with 'flag barrages,' and as there was no uncultivated ground in the locality, these practices had to be carried out over fields of growing corn. This seemed a great pity, and one did not feel at all happy in this time of scarcity, even though it was understood that the damage done would be properly paid for. Prosser supervised the digging of some trenches for bombing practice, and I started to build a rifle range. The ground,

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however, was badly waterlogged, and the range was never completed. Where excavation had taken place to provide material for the butts, the resulting pit served as a reservoir for the heavy rains, and soon had the appearance of a swimming-bath.

In the evenings there was very little to do, except play cards at the various company messes or at headquarters. There was, however, a good estaminet in the village of Rubrouck, where, in a private room, we had foregatherings of a select few, known as the 'A. and V. Society,' on several occasions, and, after good meals, spent the evening merrily. Prosser describes these functions, not without some truth or justification, as 'orgies.'

The C.O. went on leave shortly after our arrival at Rubrouck, and Mungle commanded in his absence. Secret maps began to make their appearance, and a privileged few were permitted to inspect them and hear something about the pending operations at Ypres. The battle opened, after customary artillery preparation of considerable length and enormous intensity, on the 31st of July, and the rain commenced seriously a few days previously. I think I am right in saying that for ten successive days it hardly ceased raining. This, of course, in a locality like Flanders, was a very serious thing, and was certainly the important factor in preventing, by the awful mud it caused, the complete success which was so eagerly desired. Signal messages came in at intervals, describing the progress of the offensive, and we soon got the uncomfortable conviction that things were not going as well as they were meant to do. As everyone now

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knows, what was hoped to be a break-through, became after the first two or three days a long battle of endurance in the most awful mud conditions imaginable.

Our own division formed part of the third group of divisions, whose duty would have been to 'pass through' at a certain stage of the operations, and exploit the successes gained by the first and second groups. After nearly three weeks at Rubrouck, a party was detailed by our brigade to meet parties from the other brigades of the division, and proceed in advance by motor lorry to Ypres. We alighted at the outskirts of the town, and marched the rest of the journey, on a hot and sticky afternoon, along roads and through trenches and across the open to the headquarters, at Wieltje, of the brigade of the 36th Ulster Division, then holding the sector. The country on the way up seemed one vast collection of guns and howitzers, of all calibres up to fifteen inches. The brigade headquarters at Wieltje was a vast subterranean collection of dug-outs, all connected together, and electrically lighted, and housing a large number of people. Pumps were working night and day to keep the water, which was constantly percolating through, under control.

It was the duty of the advance party to find out as much as possible about the sector, so as to be ready to assist the battalions and brigades of our own division to take over speedily from the 36th Division at the appointed time. We expected to be in the line for two or three days, but actually had to leave within about twenty-four hours to make room for an additional

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Brigade Headquarters Staff, an attack having been ordered for the next day following—the 16th of August. In the short time at our disposal we found out as much as we could, nearly bringing trouble on ourselves by flourishing maps in an exposed position, and then returned, some to rear headquarters of a Royal Irish Rifles Battalion, others to the Officers' Club at Poperinghe. In the meantime the 2/8th Royal WarwickshireRegiment received orders to leave Rubrouck on the 16th of August, marching on that day to Arneke Station, entraining there for the sidings at Houpoutre, where the battalion detrained and marched to 'B' Camp, Brandhoek, just alongside the Poperinghe-Ypres main road-and not far west of Vlamertinghe. Here we were billeted in wooden huts and were not uncomfortable. Pages might easily be written about this wonderful main road, the principal artery of the Ypres salient. Running due east and west, this fine, broad, tree-lined thoroughfare seemed altogether beyond the simple peace-time needs of the district, but in war was a tremendous asset. Leaving Poperinghe and passing between hop-gardens and small farms, there was little to see of destruction until Brandhoek was reached. Here, the roadside cottages had come in for harsh treatment, which became more apparent as Vlamertinghe, itself completely ruined, was approached. Beyond Vlamertinghe, the broken and shell-torn trees and the desolation increased rapidly, as Ypres itself came into view. And Ypres! . . . Well, the story has been told many times. The traffic along the 'road' was enormous and never-ceasing—files of troops,

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lorries, limbers, G.S.waggons, Royal Air Force tenders, staff cars, horsemen, guns, and almost endless streams of mules carrying up ammunition for the field artillery, and returning with fresh accumulations of mud on their patient flanks. How many of us realize how much the British Army owed to its long-suffering, hard-working mules? Only at rare intervals did the traffic become merely less dense. It never ceased.

We were quickly made aware of the enemy's night-bombing activity, of which there were usually several shows nightly, in addition to occasional long-range shelling. Our own camp was scattered over a considerable area, and the rest of the brigade were separated from us by some distance. The advance parties endeavoured to impart some of the knowledge and information we had gained concerning the sector, and Wooldridge and I, together with a few men, prepared a sort of model of the country over which we were expected to have to advance. Streams were represented by white tape; farms and villages by little heaps of broken bricks, and so on. It was customary, at this time, to prepare models of this kind, but, although they were interesting to make and to inspect after completion, beyond familiarising people with the names of the various places, it is doubtful whether they really served any useful purpose to troops about to attack.

The Black Square Circle was still doing excellent work, and was constantly adding fresh numbers to an already extensive repertoire. At Brandhoek we were lucky in having one very large hut, which did double

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duty, one end being used as the Headquarters Officers' Mess, and the whole hut being utilized, when convenient, as a concert room, and on one occasion as a ballroom. A stage having been rigged up at the end farther from the kitchen, performances by the Black Square Circle and Orchestra were given on frequent occasions. The Orchestra had also attained dizzy heights of proficiency under the able conductorship of Sgt. Shale. Some of the catchy tunes they used to play must recur to many of us even now, at times. The 20th of August was a red-letter day for the officers of the battalion and guests from the rest of the brigade. A special concert had been arranged, and a dance, to which sisters and nurses from the neighbouring casualty clearing stations had been invited. It was a most enjoyable evening, quite unlike anything we had experienced during our fifteen months of active service.

During the concert our anti-aircraft Lewis-gun, which was manned day and night, had occasion to start operating, and, being just outside the concert hut, created a somewhat unwelcome diversion. We were, however, all getting gradually used to these bomb-dropping raids, which took place almost nightly, and sometimes more than once a night, at all points in the back areas of the salient. One could seldom have a complete night's rest unbroken by visits from these 'night-birds,' or by long-distance shells, though the latter were less to be feared than the former. Frequently the numerous searchlights would fix on a hostile 'plane, and then, at once, fire would be opened by hundreds of machine-guns and

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anti-aircraft guns all over the district. Occasionally a Boche 'plane would be brought down, and, as it fell or spun to earth, the blaze of the many searchlights would become more and more brilliant, transforming the aeroplane into the appearance of a huge silver moth—a most uncanny sight!

The town of Poperinghe being near at hand and boasting several good restaurants and clubs, Y.M.C.A.'s, Talbot House, Divisional Concert Parties, and other opportunities for recreation and diversion, passes were freely granted to the men, and no obstacles placed in the way of the officers, so that visits could be frequently made to this cheery little town, 'lorry-jumping' being the usual means of transit. Who is likely to forget the jolly evenings spent at Cyril's, Skindle's, or the various clubs? There was a considerable amount of shelling of back areas in our neighbourhood on the night of the 21st of August, during which the hospitals were struck, causing casualties among the nurses.

During this first week at Brandhoek a certain amount of company and specialist training was carried out, but not a great deal. In the line were the 184th Brigade, with the 183rd in support just west of Ypres. On the left of the 184th Brigade was the 48th Division. Operations were now confined to sundry local attacks at various points on the main front. Each of our brigades was intended to attack and advance, in conjunction with troops on their flanks, to defined objectives. The 184th Brigade attacked on the 22nd of August, but were only partly successful. A similar result attended the effort

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made by the 183rd Brigade five days later. A small amount of ground was gained, and one or two of the concrete pill-boxes, which were proving such a difficult obstacle, were captured, but only at very great cost in casualties. The whole of the battle-front had been transformed into a vast area of sticky mud and a continuous mass of shell-holes. In circumstances like these, progress in face of concentrated machine-gun fire and heavy artillery barrages, was an impossibility. The enemy was nervous and always expecting attack, and often, at the least increase in our shelling, would send up his coloured S.O.S. rockets, which would bring down heavy hostile retaliation on our forward posts.

Meanwhile our battalion had moved forward on the 25th of August to the western outskirts of Ypres, where we bivouacked in the neighbourhood of 'Gold-fish Château,' a modern brick and stone edifice on the main Ypres-Poperinghe road near the point where it is crossed by the railway. Rumour had it that this château was the residence of a German spy, and had, for that reason, escaped complete destruction. It was, however, a small building, quite isolated, and, consequently, easy to miss. Here we were in support to the 183rd Brigade, now in the line, the 184th having moved back to the Brandhoek district, just vacated by our own brigade. There was still a great deal of bad weather, and on the 27th of August, when the 183rd Brigade did their attack, it drizzled all day long.

The 'Gold-fish Château' period was necessarily tedious by reason of circumstances. We were well forward

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in an area more or less crammed with troops and searched by hostile aircraft at all hours. No training was possible, and, apart from work in the camp, there was little else to do. My own duties were suddenly varied, and I was called to Brigade Headquarters to take over the post of Brigade Intelligence Officer, that position having been relinquished by Benoy in order to take up an instructional job at a Corps School.

The 30th of August saw the relief of the 183rd Brigade in the line, the 2/5th and 2/6 Royal Warwickshire Regiment taking over the right and left sectors of the front line, and the 2/7th and 2/8th being in support to them in the trenches in front of Wieltje, and including part of the old German front line system. The original intention had been for our brigade to attack and follow up the advantages which it was hoped the other two brigades would gain, pressing on to the s'Gravenstafel ridge. This idea was, however, abandoned when the difficulties of the situation were fully realized, and the combined brigade attack was postponed. Local actions were ordered to be carried out by the units, with the idea of improving our position wherever possible. Accordingly the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, under Lieut.-Colonel Coates, were ordered to capture Hill 35, a slight eminence overlooking our lines, and consisting of some old gun-pits, two or more concrete shelters, and a series of organized shell-holes. This position was one of great importance, and had hitherto proved a great stumbling-block. The 2/5th attacked with great pluck and persistence, time after time, with

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and without artillery preparation, but were unable to capture the place, owing to the very heavy machine-gun fire from the position itself, and from the pill-boxes and strong points supporting it on both flanks. Heavy casualties were sustained. The 2/6th Battalion volunteered to make an attempt, and, accordingly, Saunders and his company made a night attack. They reached one concrete pill-box, but were unable to force an entrance, and, after a fine effort, the attempt was given up. On the night of the 2/3rd of September the 2/7th and 2/8th Battalions took over the right and left front line sectors. The weather had improved a little, and the ground in parts had become a little firmer. The conditions, however, were still indescribably uncomfortable.

An idea had been conceived, and had been ordered to be adopted through divisions, during offensive operations, that of leaving out of the line a small percentage of officers and men from each company while in action. This percentage was known as the 'Battle Surplus,' and remained with the battalion transport and Quartermaster's stores during the action or tour in the line. It was intended that these should form a nucleus, in case of heavy casualties or disaster, for the reconstruction of the unit when reinforcements should arrive. The personnel of the surplus, of course, changed for every new tour in the line during service in a battle zone. This practice was now put in operation in our battalion, and certain lucky people were left out. I may be permitted to say that this luck never came my way, but I am glad now to be able to say that I never missed a tour as long as I was with the battalion.

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Corporal Foster's Brave Attempt

Left Battalion Headquarters was at Capricorn Keep, a series of massive reinforced concrete 'pill-boxes,' with a trench system connected thereto. The greater part of the actual front line, however, consisted of disconnected shell-holes held by small posts of men, and lay astride the Wieltje-s'Gravenstafel road. A silent attack was ordered on a concrete strong-point, known as Aisne Farm, and was carried out by part of 'C' Company under Watson. The attempt was within an ace of success, but at the crucial moment the attackers were observed and heavy machine-gun fire compelled them to withdraw. Scott was wounded, and Sgt. Walker killed. Corporal Foster, of Headquarters Mess, made a plucky attempt to bring in Sgt. Walker's body. For his bravery he was awarded the Military Medal.

Headquarters had a nasty shock one day when a 'heavy' landed just outside the principal 'pill-box,' where most of the headquarters officers were assembled. The heavy door, facing the enemy, of course, having formerly been German, was blown in, all the lights extinguished, and the occupants flung about in various directions. 'B' Company had the misfortune to lose several splendid N.C.O.'s during this tour, but, considering all things, our casualties were not excessive. The most dangerous thing in this part of the line was movement in the open. It had to be done to a large extent, of course, but the hostile shelling was so universal that one could never be sure where the next one would land. Daylight movement was carefully noted from Boche observation balloons, many of which were well forward, and it was quite a common thing to be potted at by German pip-squeaks

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or whizz-bangs, under the direction of their balloon observers. During the night of the 5-6th of September the battalion moved back into support in 'call reserve' trench, just in front of brigade headquarters at Wieltje, and after three uneventful days here returned to Brandhoek, doing the greater part of the journey by light railway.

We were now to lose Farmer, who, after a farewell dinner and sing-song, on the 9th of September, left us for a period of duty in England. A most conscientious officer, Farmer had given of his best for sixteen months and well merited a rest. We were also to lose Vickers, who, after similar farewell celebrations, left us on the following day, much against his will. In an unwise moment he had, some months previously, applied for transfer to the Indian Medical Service. Time passed, he heard nothing, and forgot that he had ever applied. To his surprise and disgust an order suddenly came through for his transfer, and his remarks will not be put in black and white here. The duties of Adjutant were taken over by Prosser, but we were without a Medical Officer for some time. A warning to be prepared to go into the line and take part in a big 'show' was received on the morning of the 11th, but was cancelled later in the day. There was opportunity now for company parades, cleaning up and baths, etc. There was also a football match with the 2/6th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, which we lost to them by two goals to none. There was usually music and humour by the Concert Party in the evenings, or, if one could get into Poperinghe, by the Divisional Frolics,

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who celebrated their 100th performance on the 12th of September.

We were now to bid farewell to the Ypres salient, after nearly a month's service here, during which we had been tried and had not been found wanting. Moreover, our good fortune as a battalion still held, and we came away without having incurred those fearful losses which it was the fate of so many units to sustain in this cauldron. So it was good-bye to Brandhoek, good-bye to Gold-fish Château, Salvation Corner, la Brique, Dead-end, St Jean, Wieltje, Spree Farm and all the other familiar spots, when we marched back to Watou on the 14th of September. Here the battalion occupied tents at Esk Camp, and stayed for three days. All was now very peaceful, and one could sleep safely at night without much risk of being bombed or disturbed by long-range shells.

There was now a change in the command of the 182nd Brigade. Brigadier-General Sir Chas. Sackville-West left to take a post on the Allied Supreme Council in Paris, where he was shortly afterwards followed by Lieut.-Colonel Sir H. Wake, our Divisional G.S.O.1. Our brigade was now to be commanded by a freshly-appointed Brigadier, who joined us at Watou, Brigadier-General Croft, formerly commanding a battalion of Scottish Rifles. None of the original Brigade Staff were now left, Captain Graham having succeeded Major Heelis as Brigade Major some months previously, and Captain Thorburn having succeeded Captain Landon as Staff Captain even longer ago.

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In camp, near ourselves, were the 48th Division, in which were our first-line units. This was the first and only time we actually met in France, although we had been fairly close to them during the German retreat in the early spring, and had held the adjacent sector in the line just vacated. A number of new officers and a small reinforcement of other ranks joined the battalion at Watou, but there were no other events of note. One of the new officers was Tyler, formerly a much-valued N.C.O. of 'C' Company, whose brave conduct had secured for him the award of the Military Medal. Another new arrival was A.R. Jones, a frail-looking young officer with a most striking personality. 'Devotion to duty'—a very much-employed phrase throughout the war—yet describes Jones's all-absorbing passion. He had no acquaintance with fear, and carried out every job assigned to him with the most scrupulous care and conscientiousness. In the line, he was never known to sleep, and considered it his duty to be on the alert twenty-four hours in every day.

On the 17th of September the battalion moved from Watou, marching via Abeele and Steenworde, to No. 3 Camp at Eecke, a small village on the lower slopes of the Mont des Cats. The battalion was accommodated partly in tents, partly in barns, the camp itself being on the road leading from Eecke to St Sylvestre-Cappel.

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CHAPTER X. ARRAS AND THE CAMBRAI SHOW

A SHORT rest of two days at Eecke, during which football matches were the feature, was followed by a further move. The brigade marched by battalions to the station of Caestre on the Poperinghe-Hazebrouck railway, where they entrained at intervals during the day, our battalion leaving at 7.45 p.m. A long and tedious journey followed, terminating in the early hours of the following morning at Arras. A short march brought the battalion to billets at Dainville, a village south-west of Arras, where a two days' halt was made. There followed, early on the 22nd of September, a march through the streets of Arras to the village of St Nicolas, lying just north of the city. St Nicolas had, up till April of this year, been well in the forward area of the Arras sector, and, in consequence, had been badly battered, but there were a few comparatively sound houses and numerous cellars, all forming good accommodation for canteens, field ambulances, quartermaster's stores, and not a few did good service as temporary desirable residences for troops. Our brigade, however, was quartered in a hut encampment in the open country above the village known as Lancaster camp. The 2/8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment took over the huts which had been in occupation by the 3/4th Royal West Kents.

On the following day—Sunday, the 23rd of September—our battalion took over a section of trenches from the 7th Lincolns in the area west of the one-time village

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of Roeux, where they were in support to the 2/7th in the front line running east of the village, and known as the 'Chemical Works Sector.' This sector will remain long in the memory as the scene of the very heavy fighting, in the early days of May, for Roeux Station and Chemical Works, which marked the closing scenes of the great Arras-Vimy Ridge Battle of 1917. Even at this date—over four months later—there were still a number of unburied bodies in the vicinity of the Chemical Works, approach to which, owing to the exposed nature of the ground, was considered too dangerous. Sgt. Ray discovered, behind battalion headquarters, a long line of rifles and about 200 entrenching tools, all badly rusted. There was, however, no other indication as to the fate of their one-time owners. The sector, as a whole, had now become reasonably quiet, and the trenches and dug-outs were in excellent condition, the weather being very lovely just at this time. Troops in the support trenches were able to bathe unmolested in the River Scarpe, which ran conveniently near. A small service of motor-boats ran in the evenings between Arras and Fampoux for the purpose of bringing sundry stores well into the forward zone. It was permitted, for persons who had permission, to go from the support trenches into Arras for baths, etc. and make the return journey by motor-boat, if they could find room.

The Arras front, having become quiescent, was now used for 'rest-cure' purposes for troops who had been through the mill in the Ypres salient. Life was certainly worth living here, even in the front line, as long as the

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weather remained fine, and, when in reserve at St Nicolas, the troops had the numerous attractions and amenities of Arras itself to enjoy. The officers, too, had the advantage of the excellent 'Officers' Club,' which had been opened in the small, but beautiful, recreation ground on the northern outskirts of the town. There was also the Hôtel du Commerce, in the Rue Gambetta, open, almost without intermission, throughout the war. Here officers could obtain excellent meals at a reasonable price.

Meanwhile Brigadier-General Croft, who was an enthusiast for Brigade Schools of Instruction, had successfully opened a 182nd Brigade School at St Nicolas, to which each battalion contributed its quota of instructors, specializing in scouting, bombing, Lewis-gun training, map-reading, N.C.O. training, physical and bayonet training, and so forth. This was only just started when Brigadier-General Croft left us to return to his old division, and was succeeded by Brigadier-General Evans after a few days' interval, during which Colonel Cadman acted as Brigade Commander. The 2/7th and 2/8th relieved one another alternately in the front and support areas on the 26th and 29th of September, and the 5th, 11th, and 16th of October. During these days nothing of a startling or uncommon nature occurred. In the front line trench routine and occasional 'spitefulness' or 'hate' was undertaken, and in the support trenches—'Northumberland Avenue,' etc.—Royal Engineer working parties were required and provided for various jobs. On the 16th of October the brigade was relieved, and marched back to Arras, where the 2/8th Battalion was accom-

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modated in Levis Barracks, the officers finding reasonably good billets in private houses in the near neighbourhood.

The Brigade School had now moved into the city, and found suitable quarters at the École des Jeunes Filles in the Rue Gambetta. The Battalion Concert Party, or Black Square Circle, re-opened on the 18th of October at St George's Hall, with an excellent programme, to which additional attraction was given by the inclusion of Rogers, Claydon, and Sgt. Ray. Being now in Divisional Reserve, there was time for the very necessary bathing and general cleaning-up after so long a period of trench-residence. Arrangements had been made for swimming in the fine lake at the Citadel, an opportunity which was welcomed by numerous enthusiasts. In various places in the city were numbers of captured German guns, with the names of the battalions who had captured them in the spring offensive chalked up on the barrels or shields.

The battalion was represented at the Brigade School by Gough in charge of the bombing instruction—Gilderthorpe also was in this department for a short time—and myself in charge of the Lewis-gun classes, I having been replaced as Brigade Intelligence Officer, while in hospital for a short time, by Payne of the 2/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. A Cookery Class also was supervised by our Battalion Sgt. Master-Cook, Finnemore. The routine at the School was rather monotonous, but was occasionally relieved by sundry practice attacks over the old 'no man's land,' in which scouts, Lewis-gunners and bombers co-operated.

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After twelve days in reserve the 182nd Brigade again went into line on the 28th of October, relieving the 184th in the Greenland Hill sector. Our battalion took over from the 2/5th Gloucesters in the front line. The new sector, which formed part of the left half of the divisional front, lay south-east of the village of Gavrelle. The trenches were good at first, but deteriorated later when the weather broke up somewhat. Whatmore had now returned and taken over the duties of second-in-command from Mungle.

There was considerable trench-mortar activity in this sector, as, indeed, on the whole divisional front. Apart from this, however, nothing calls for special note except the big raid which was carried out by the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. This was a great success, and resulted in fourteen prisoners being captured. Two companies took part in this raid, and the casualties sustained were quite trifling. Relief took place on the 3rd, 9th and 15th of November, the battalion being alternately in front line and support, and on the 21st of November the whole brigade returned to Arras, occupying the same billets as before. Major Phillips had now returned from Canadian leave, after three months' absence, and Prosser shortly afterwards going on ordinary leave, Whatmore took over the Adjutancy of the battalion. Prosser, on his return, was given command of 'D' Company.

For some weeks now, there had been rumours heard of an impending surprise attack, which was to take place, so it was thought, on some portion of the very quiet length of front south of Arras. There was talk of unusual activity on the roads at night; quantities of Royal En-

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gineer stores being moved from place to place, etc. And then, suddenly, early in the morning of the 24th of November, after a short sharp bombardment by all the local artillery on a front of about ten miles between Pronville on the left and Banteux on the right, the infantry, preceded by numerous tanks, attacked and carried all before them, making numerous captures of guns and several thousand prisoners. The cavalry were in action, too, and penetrated as far as the outskirts of Cambrai. About a dozen villages were captured, and there can be no doubt that if our reserves had been proportionate to the size of the attack, this brilliant episode might easily have led to much greater things. As it was, the attack had been designed to relieve the Passchendaele front, where the long and costly offensive had at last terminated, but where nearly all available reserves were still concentrated, in case of hostile counter-offensive. Thus, the insufficiency of reserve troops prevented the breaking of the enemy resistance at the critical points of Moeuvres, la Folie and Rumilly, and the attack stopped, after penetrating the enemy's front to a depth of five miles, and breaking through the wonderful Hindenburg Line. Our own division, so we were to learn, was one of those held in reserve to meet eventualities, but we did not leave the Arras neighbourhood until six days after the commencement of the battle. As would be expected, the Boche at once began preparations for a counter-attack, which was duly launched.

Meantime, on the 26th of November, orders were issued for the Brigade School to break up, and instruc-

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tors and instructed prepared to rejoin their units. The news of the forthcoming move was made known at the time the 2/8th and 2/7th were playing a football match, which was won by the 2/8th by one goal to none. Curiously enough, this was the last match played by the battalion as a unit. Gough and I took leave of our delightful little one-storey billet near the railway station, furnished and renovated at considerable expense, and after much research work among the neighbouring ruins and other premises, Gough rejoining brigade headquarters, and I rejoining the battalion for good. On the 28th of November we moved by march route to the village of Wanquetin, which, as we had already heard, had been badly damaged by the explosion of a large ammunition dump some time previously. We were now some six miles west of Arras and nearly four east of the small town of Avesnes-le-Comte, and made a stay of two nights in billets which might certainly have been worse and, considering the damaged condition of the place, were even good. The explosion had smashed all the glass in the village, and glass being difficult to procure and very expensive, substitutes had been found in the form of oiled paper or oiled fabric, which, although decidedly opaque, at any rate protected the residents from wind and weather.

Signs of the impending counter-attack had been noted, and, in due course, the enemy struck, on the 30th of November, with great force, in two places, both near the points of junction which our new salient formedwith the old front. Low-flying aeroplanes fired machine-guns

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incessantly into the front line posts held by our troops, and, having brought up heavy reinforcements of artillery, the enemy was able to bring down an intense bombardment prior to the attack. Fighting was very bitter, but the enemy's superiority in numbers gave him a large measure of success, so much, indeed, that large captures of men and guns fell to him, and he succeeded in the first few hours in driving a wedge into our front on the southern extremity, and penetrated beyond the old front line, capturing Villers Guislain, Gonnelieu and Gouzeaucourt. In the north the fighting was very intense at Bourlon Wood, parts of which changed hands several times, and there were heavy casualties on both sides. The wood, however, was not recaptured by the enemy on this the first day of the counter-attack.

The situation in the south, however, became very serious and at one time there was a gap in the British front, and if the enemy had been prepared for so much success there was nothing to stop him from pushing on much further. The Guards Division, however, was rushed up in time, and succeeded in filling the breach. During the latter part of the day the Irish Guards attacked and recaptured Gouzeaucourt, where strenuous fighting continued for some time. The enemy losses here had been very heavy and our own had not been light.

In the morning of the same day, meanwhile, the 61st Division moved south. The 2/8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, in its turn, marched to the railway station at Beaumetz-les-Loges, where we entrained in the after-

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noon, and moved off with little delay, first in the direction of Arras, changing direction at Achicourt, where the main line was reached, and following the latter to Achiet-le-Grand, whence we branched off to Bapaume station, where we detrained, long after dark. There was a certain amount of excitement in the station square at Bapaume, where we were given some information as to the progress of events during the day. A Brigadier-General remarked that it was a great relief to witness our arrival after a most anxious day.

Shortly after, we moved off through the ruins of Bapaume, looking strangely ghostly in the night, with few signs of life visible, and came to a halt outside the town alongside what seemed an endless line of motor omnibuses. Here there was a very long delay, during which more than one of us, I fear, broke into our iron rations, without permission, munching dry biscuit or whatever else we could find to eat, not having had any rations issued during the day, and having passed a long while without a meal. Others, including, it is stated on good authority, more than one senior officer, searched the roadside ditch for tins of bully-beef—and found some. Most of the troops rested by the roadside or sat in the waiting 'buses tired and hungry. At long last, we 'embussed,' and drove off into the night. A lengthy journey it seemed, but eventually the 'buses came to a stop, and we were dumped somewhere just west of Havrincourt Wood, and thence we marched on into the ruined village of Metz-en-Couture, on the south side of the wood, where we were greeted with occasional long-

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distance shells from the Boche. Here we established temporary battalion headquarters in a 'baby elephant' by the roadside, and the men were put into huts close at hand. Almost as if by magic, Corporal Foster produced a meal at the tiny headquarters within half-an-hour or thereabouts. Hardly had we realised we were here, than we were not, so to speak, for, at two a.m. about, orders came through from brigade to move forward again. The next halt was made at Heudicourt, a ruined village some three miles to the south of Metz-en-Couture, lying just south-west of Gouzeaucourt. Here we were in support to the Guards holding the last-named place, which they had recaptured some hours before.

The night was very calm, only occasionally broken by desultory shelling, which left us untouched. Only our unaccustomed surroundings reminded us that anything unusual had taken place, and, being in 'readiness B,' that something further might still be expected. For the remainder of the night, however, we were undisturbed, and those who could sleep just anywhere, as most people can, after long hours of excitement, no doubt snatched a few hours' sleep, under whatever limited cover offered itself. There were, at Heudicourt, various Quarter-master's Stores belonging to units of the 20th Division, which, together with the 12th Division, in this part of the line, had, so we heard, been very badly cut up in the battle of the day before. There was plenty of bully beef and biscuits to be had in the various stores, and we were able to replenish our iron rations and feed our hungry stomachs. During the following day we were joined by

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our Transport and Quartermaster's Stores, and Shutt and Quartermaster Hodgkins proceeded to peg out a claim in the village.

The hours of daylight were spent in private exploration, within reasonable distance of the battalion, should we be required to join hurriedly. From the summit of the high ground lying between Heudicourt and Gouzeaucourt, one could look down on the ruins of the latter village, which, from time to time, were subjected to heavy 'strafing' by the Boche. There were numerous signs of the heavy fighting of the previous day, Gouzeaucourt itself looking as though it had had a very rough time, and was still having one. There were a good many brave men lying dead on the ground. What more moving sight can be imagined than a dead Guardsman, lying where he fell?

On the railway, near Heudicourt, there was a huge British gun which from time to time, hurled forth enormous shells on some selected objective behind the enemy's lines. The whole of the day was spent in expectation of orders of one kind or another, and we were all anticipating that in a few hours at most we should again be facing the Boche. We were, however, destined to spend another night at Heudicourt, quite undisturbed, and although conditions were decidedly cramped, owing to the limited amount of accommodation available, there can be no doubt that most people had a good long night's rest.

The following day, Sunday, the 2nd of December, in the morning, we moved by road, by a circuitous route, to

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Gouzeaucourt Wood, about a mile and a half north-west of the village of the same name, where we remained for the rest of the day, in readiness to move up into the line. On arrival in the wood we were greeted with considerable hostile shelling, but, fortunately, only trifling casualties were sustained, and we spread ourselves out over the wood and waited for darkness. Eventually we moved forward *via* 'Dead Man's Corner,' and a trench running along the crest of Beaucamp Ridge known as Lincoln Avenue, to Villers Plouich, a ruined village on the Péronne-Cambrai railway. In Lincoln Avenue, a communication trench, which at one time during the German counter-attack had actually been our front-line, we passed men of all descriptions—pioneers, sappers, and the like—all standing to arms. This told its own tale of the severity of the fighting.

Avoiding the village of Villers Plouich, which was frequently subjected to heavy German shelling, our guides, who had now joined us, led us across country over the railway line to the Marcoing-road. This we followed for a short distance, and then struck off again across country, up the eastern slopes of the valley through which the railway ran, across the captured Hindenburg Line, as far as a string of posts occupied by British troops. Our instructions had been to take over the front line, as we found it, from the remnants of the 12th and 20th Divisions, who were scantily strung out and rather mixed up together in sundry posts. No definite information could be given us beforehand as to the position of the front-line, but later we discovered our

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location to be at the northern end of the high ground known as 'Welsh Ridge.' By degrees the relief of the scattered posts occupied by men of the 7th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and others was completed. The night was fine and remarkably quiet after all the noisy activity of the last three days, but it was not until daylight that any useful observation could be carried out. The following day, the 3rd of December, was, on our immediate front, quiet, as also on that of the 183rd Brigade on our right near la Vacquerie. We had good views across the lower hills and valleys to the north and and north-east, and could plainly see Bourlon Wood, Fontaine-Notre-Dame, Cantaing, Marcoing and other villages, and, in the distance, the spires of Cambrai itself suggesting, in the brilliant sunshine and low haze of this early morning, a scene in fairyland. But the illusion was not to last long.

The importance of Bourlon Wood to either side was, from its commanding position, at once evident ; it was, at the moment, in our possession, although Fontaine-Notre-Dame, to the east of the wood, had been recaptured by the enemy. There were some notable reminders of the heavy fighting and the hostile advance towards our present front—several derelict tanks, for instance, and a number of dug-outs which had been hastily evacuated. One of the latter had been an advanced divisional headquarters, the occupants of which had left behind sundry stores of stationery, an officer's tunic with M.C. ribbon, and other clothing and goods of various kinds.

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During the morning a heavy bombardment of Bourlon Wood commenced and lasted for a long time. Quite certainly there was something unpleasant going on over there. There was also some activity down at Marcoing. At the end of the day Bourlon Wood had passed into the enemy's hands, and in consequence our salient was narrowed down to such an extent that there was danger of our being pinched out. Accordingly, orders were issued for Marcoing and several other villages to be evacuated, after dark, in order to straighten out the line. Our own immediate front was unaltered, but the effect of the withdrawal was to bring our line into closer proximity with the enemy.

The first day came to a close without our becoming involved, and the night was fairly quiet. In the morning, however, there were early signs of activity on our right. The enemy was seen massing for an attack on the right of the divisional front, and, although repeated messages were sent back, we were not successful in getting artillery fire in time to break up the hostile formations. A heavy attack took place, and the 183rd Brigade were forced back through la Vacquerie, just west of which village the hostile advance was stopped. There was a regrettable absence of British aeroplanes on this morning. During the morning our own 'A' Company became involved in heavy fighting for a bit of trench in advance of the general line, in which, however, the company headquarters were situated. Here, for a long time, Gibbins, the company commander, and two men, fought hard to keep the enemy from breaking our line, against a much

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larger number of Germans. At length, Gibbins was killed by a hostile bomb, which exploded close to him, after a very gallant fight against big odds. His conduct was so magnificent that the C.O. reported fully on the incident, with a strong recommendation for the award of the Victoria Cross. The fight was carried on after Gibbins fell, and additional officers were sent from other companies, of whom Jessop and Stephens were wounded. Duckworth also did very fine work, on taking charge of the company, and his skilful handling of a difficult situation was rewarded with the Military Cross. A splendid example of bravery and devotion to duty was also shown by Corporal Meredith, whose fine work on previous occasions had already been recognized by the award of the Military Medal. This brave N.C.O. battled with ceaseless determination and spirit until he was killed fighting, and was literally buried by falling-in trenches. Eventually the trench was evacuated, and our line straightened out at this point. During this period in the front line, the C.O., who was suffering from a severe attack of gout, not only insisted on going into the line, but paid his usual periodical visits to all parts of the battalion, crippled as he was, with his foot bandaged and hobbling along with two sticks. This is a typical example of the tremendous keenness which the Colonel always exhibited. The night of the 4th of December was fairly quiet, except for occasional shelling, and the following day was not too unpleasant. In the evening we were relieved by the 36th (Ulster) Division, which took over a portion of our divisional sector. We moved back

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into support in the 'Hindenburg Support Line' trenches north-east of Villers Plouich. A platoon of 'D' Company under Bevan put in an extra twenty-four hours in the front line.

On the 6th of December things were fairly quiet during the day, but warmed up tremendously at night. The Boche was very keen on dropping 5.9's near the entrances to the dug-outs, the positions of all of which he knew to a foot or two. This support line was a very fine German trench, with numerous excellent dug-outs, with plenty of wire beds, and apart from the anxiety and expectation of attack at any time we were fairly comfortable while here.

During the night of the 6th of December 'D' Company took over a portion of line from a company of the 2/6th Royal Warwickshire Regiment commanded by Sheldon, and it lost some valuable N.C.O.'s during the short period of front-line duty which followed. For the rest of the battalion the situation remained quiet throughout the daylight hours, but in the evening things livened up very considerably. The 2/6th were attacked, with accompanying heavy shelling on different parts of the brigade area, and the enemy penetrated a small portion of the front line. The situation was restored later, but the casualties in the brigade were somewhat heavy. During the same night our 'A,' 'B' and 'C' companies and headquarters were relieved by a battalion of Inniskilling Fusiliers of the 36th (Ulster) Division, and moved back to the south-east corner of Havrincourt Wood, where tents and bivouac sheets formed the accommoda-

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tion we were to occupy for a few days. The 2/6th shared this corner of the wood with us,and the number of tents, etc., being very small, overcrowding was very prevalent, and, indeed, unavoidable. Still we were all much too fatigued after a very anxious tour in the line, and not much sleep, to worry about overcrowding, or even about the mud which lay everywhere around us.'D' Company were to have been relieved early in the following morning, partly by Inniskillings and partly by the 2/5th Gloucesters.The company relieving, however, had only a theoretical existence, and Prosser had to take his company out under his own arrangements. The Gloucesters had recently had a trying experience. In moving up to the line, one of their companies had halted by the roadside just north of Villers Plouich, dangerously near a large shell dump. At this moment, the enemy unfortunately scored a direct hit on the dump, which was destroyed, and a large proportion of the company was put out of action. Our 'D' company, on the way out to rejoin the battalion, in crossing a valley, were harassed with gas shells, and their officers, Griffiths, Smith and Wareham, and a number of men were slightly gas-poisoned, putting them out of action for a considerable period. The company was thus reduced to two officers and forty men.

Early in the morning of the 9th of December, the enemy started to shell our corner of the wood, and a 5.9 dropped into the middle of the partly sleeping camp. A hasty move was desirable, in view of the overcrowding, and, in various stages of undress, the camp migrated to a quieter spot. Prosser, unable to find his boots, and

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being only partly dressed, was carried across the mud, to the amusement of many. Luckily, we escaped casualties, but the 2/6th were not quite so fortunate, having one or two men hit. Enemy aircraft were very active over this area, and it seemed evident that our tents, etc., though camouflaged, had been observed, and a move was, therefore, ordered to a more thickly-wooded site. The remainder of the day was spent in making things as comfortable as possible, and in the evening a conference of officers took place.

On the following morning the G.O.C. Division gave an address to the 182nd Brigade, formed up in mass in the open country between the wood and Metz-en-Couture. During the address, a large mixed flight of German aeroplanes passed overhead, flying fairly low. Why on earth we were not soon after bombed or shelled to bits, always remained a mystery, as we must have formed a very obvious feature of the landscape to any aerial observer. Probably they had some very special work in hand and were not bothering about anything else.

In the evening of the 10th, preparations were made to go into support in trenches forming part of the old British front-line system—Merthyr and Rhondda trenches—just north of Villers Plouich. The same evening I had a flattering invitation to go to the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment as temporary second-in-command, that battalion having suffered serious casualties in officers and men during the first few days near la Vacquerie. I went, somewhat unwillingly, I fear, to the

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2/5th Headquarters, and found that I was expected to take the battalion into the front-line in an hour or two. The next few days were spent in front-line and in support to the 2/6th about Beaucamp, during which quietness reigned. Several of the 2/5th officers having returned from leave, I gladly returned to my own battalion.

On the 12th of December, meanwhile, our battalion, with 'A' and 'D' Companies temporarily amalgamated, took over from the 2/6th a trench system, where they remained, with two companies in the front line and the remainder in support, until the 16th, sustaining frequent hostile shelling, sometimes very heavy, moving back on the latter date to huts, etc., at Etricourt, where we rejoined our Transport and Quartermaster's Stores and Details.

On the following morning the Colonel, whose gout attack had become very severe, and who had been compelled on that account to miss the last few days in the trenches, had to give up and go into hospital for treatment, for some time. He said a regretful farewell to the battalion as we marched out that morning on the way to Manancourt, only a short distance away, where we occupied huts erected at one end of the ruined village. Nearly opposite to us were the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, also in a hut encampment.

We had now said good-bye to the 'Cambrai Show,' but as will be remembered, there was quite a considerable struggle for Welsh Ridge after we left, the whole of it remaining in British hands, however, although there

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were slight changes in the line further to the north. At Manancourt we were still in the desolate area laid waste by the enemy preparatory to his retreat in March. A further change at headquarters took place at this time. Whatmore, who had been acting adjutant since his return at Arras, went down sick, and the duties were taken over by myself until the final disbandment of the battalion. Although we were well back from the forward zone at Manancourt, we were not yet away from the enemy's activities, for there were bombing raids from the air each night, but these were, happily, of short duration and, in any case, did not actually reach us. Alongside the village ran the little River Tortille, the waters of which had been destined partly to feed the Canal du Nord, the site of which ran close by. A good deal of work had been done by the French on this new canal—embankments had been formed, roads diverted and bridges constructed. The last-named had, of course, been systematically destroyed by the enemy in his retreat.

Having had a harassing time for well over a fortnight, we were greatly encouraged to think that there was every prospect of being out of the line for Christmas for the second year in succession. There was much work to be done in cleaning and general smartening-up and re-equipment in the battalion. Several days were spent in this way at Manancourt, and much was done to stimulate the *amour-propre* of the battalion, among other ways by reviving as many of the bugle-calls as possible; Tattoo was given regularly every night, as well as Reveille, Orderly Room, Officers' Mess, etc. It re-

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minded one of the old days on the Plain to hear such calls as 'Orderly Room,' 'Officers' Dress,' 'First Post,' 'Last Post,' etc., and one wondered how the 2/5th enjoyed it, or whether they would have preferred peace and quietness.

What a hive of industry the orderly-room always seemed! There could be no doubt of the efficiency of the staff there—Sgt. Belfield, Cpl. Cooksey, and Cpl. Walker. The enormous number of returns constantly being called for, the analysis of information supplied by companies, the preparation of routine and operation orders, situation and weather reports, Part II Orders, and so forth, kept these devoted N.C.O.'s up, at times, half-way through the night, even out of the line. Small wonder, then, that Sgt. Belfield could only on rare occasions devote half-an-hour or so to the development and exercise of his literary talents.

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CHAPTER XI. CHRISTMAS 1917. BACK TO ST QUENTIN. THE DISBANDMENT

THE C.O. being away, the command of the battalion was carried on by Major Phillips. A new commander was required for 'A' Company to succeed Gibbins, and the choice fell on Rogers, who was duly appointed. Conditions were now very wintry, and there was a good deal of ice and snow. We were thankful, therefore, for the protection afforded by huts and, there being plenty of wooded country in the neighbourhood, there was no shortage of fuel, so that, on the whole, we had a fairly jolly time at Manancourt. All things come to an end, however, and, on service, sometimes rather suddenly, not to say unexpectedly.

Our next move came on Christmas Eve, when we marched to the rail-head at Ytres, rather less than two miles to the north. Here we entrained in the usual cattle trucks labelled 'hommes 40, chevaux 8 (en long),' our destination being Corbie. The day was bitterly cold, the journey slow, uncomfortable and tedious. The route lay across the old Somme battlefield area of 1916, and it is difficult to imagine anything more dreary and desolate than those snow-covered wastes of rolling treeless country appeared to us as we traversed them slowly in the fading light of a winter sunset, from le Transloy to Buire, where we joined the main line from Albert to Amiens, finally detraining at Corbie long after dark.

Then began an exciting march to our final rest billets at Cérisy-Gailly, about eight kilometres away. The route

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lay eastwards and parallel to the River Somme. The roads had a thick coating of snow which had frozen hard and smooth, almost like glass. As we passed the little shops in the town of Corbie, we noticed plentiful supplies of poultry which augured well for our own Christmas festivities. The road was not really bad until we had left Corbie behind, and then the excitement began. It would have been laughable to have attempted to keep in step. The drums soon had to give up playing as a bad job, and everyone slipped and slithered and stumbled and slid, and occasionally some unfortunate wight lost his balance and fell, amid shouts of derision and amusement. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the excitement of the journey put everyone into a good humour, although the constant striving to keep one's balance was somewhat of a tax on the muscles, and produced a state of considerable fatigue by the time the journey was completed.

Passing through Vaux-sur-Somme, Sailly-le-Sec and Sailly-Laurette, we were met just before reaching Cérisy Gailly by Wooldridge and the rest of the billeting party. We were not long in settling down in reasonably good billets, and found that Cérisy was a village of some size, the western end of which had been rather badly damaged by the explosion of an ammunition dump some time previously. North of the village ran the River Somme and its canal, while on the further bank stood the small village of Chipilly, beyond which the country rose sharply to the high ground separating the Somme and Ancre valleys. To the south, also, the land sloped steeply up to

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the fertile and extensive Santerre plateau, with which we were already familiar in the districts round Framerville, Rosières, Harbonnières and Marcelcave.

Owing to the move, it was found desirable to celebrate Christmas on the 26th of December, especially as the post was a day or two late and the ration Christmas puddings could not be delivered in time for the 25th. The festival was enjoyed none the less by being a day late, and an excellent feast was provided for the troops, and the abundance of snow on the hillsides and on the roofs and trees gave that picturesque and appropriate setting that one instinctively hopes to get at Christmastide, but so frequently does not get. There was a Casualty Clearing Station at Cérisy-Gailly, possessing an excellent concert party, and a roomy, if somewhat draughty, wooden theatre, in which a special afternoon performance was given for our benefit, and was, of course, attended by the battalion en masse.

Christmas over, we set to work on the usual routine of a unit in rest, company and specialist training, refitting and inspections, inter-company football matches, cross-country runs and so forth. We were not to remain very long, however, at Cérisy, for, in less than a week, a move was ordered to Beaucourt, a village just off the Amiens-Roye road,a long day's march to the south. The first portion of the journey had to be reconnoitred beforehand owing to the condition of the roads. The route finally selected was by way of Morcourt and the steep ascent to the Santerre table-land and the Amiens-Péronne road, thence through Bayonvillers, Wiencourt

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and Cayeux. On the way we passed groups of healthy-looking German prisoners, who seemed to be enjoying their captivity considerably.

Arriving at length at Beaucourt-en-Santerre, to give it its full name, after a long and tiring march, along roads in many places feet deep in snow, we decided, on inspecting our new billets, that the place was not bad, and we soon made up our minds that it was quite good, and even a decided improvement on Cérisy. The snow had not been quite so heavy in this district as in the Somme valley, but there was still a great deal. Battalion headquarters was in a very fine old château looking out towards the Amiens-Roye road, across what, in peace time, no doubt, had been a beautiful expanse of lawn, but which was now overgrown. On the opposite side of the road was a further grassy expanse, which served as an excellent battalion parade-ground. In the château grounds were numerous outbuildings, which gave good accommodation for many of the men, the remainder being billeted in the village.

Mention must be made of our American M.O., Whitaker, who had joined us some days before while we were in the Cambrai zone. After getting accustomed to a few American idiosyncrasies, we found him to be a real good sort and a terrible enthusiast for the war and against everything German.

A large draft of fine fellows joined us at Beaucourt, and the battalion, with this addition, became stronger in numbers than it had been for a long while. These were followed, a little later, by two new officers, D. Pitt and

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W. R. Scutt. Training was of the usual kind, and included musketry and tactical exercises. There was a famous ride, or, rather, steeplechase, for mounted officers, organized by Major Phillips, in which only three of us finished, including Tonks, on Kate, the peaceful mess-cart horse.

The award of the Military Cross to Whatmore and Watson figured in the New Year's Honours List. Watson was, soon after, acting O.C. 'C' Company, in the absence of Slater, who went down sick. Signs of our next move came on the 7th of January, 1918, when headquarters and company officers made a long, cold and tedious lorry journey to the sector of line next to be taken over by us in the near future, returning to new billets the same day, after reconnoitring. The country was still thickly covered with snow, and in some places where the roads were little used they were hardly discernible. At one point near Vermandovillers we actually missed the road, and were in danger of becoming partially engulfed in deep snow. Extricating ourselves we eventually made the main Amiens-St Quentin road, and found the going much easier. The roads were strangely silent in the snow, almost the only sounds being the whirr of the engine of our lorry and the musical jingle of the chains fixed round the tyres.

Arriving at the small ruined town of Vermand, we descended from the lorry and continued the journey on foot, along the main road as far as Holnon Wood, where, at the Maison de Garde, or Forest-keeper's Lodge, as we should call it, we picked up French guides, who con-

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ducted us across country to the headquarters at Fayet of the French battalion we were shortly to relieve. Our Company officers were conducted to the different portions of the line and supporting points held by the corresponding French companies, and a general reconnaissance of the sector ensued. It will be remembered that our Division had held this sector for several weeks in the spring of the preceding year, and we now found that a good many changes had taken place since the French Army had resumed control. Trenches and numerous dug-outs had been constructed, as well as strong points. We were, perhaps, a little disappointed to find that the advance points we had held had been given up by the French, but we realized that it was probably for the best, as the said posts had not been at all well sited, some of them having a restricted outlook, and were not of much real value. The French officers were most kind, hospitable, and anxious to give every information in their power.

Having reached the time limit, we all returned to Vermand, where we rejoined the lorry, and started out on our cold and tedious return journey. In our absence, the battalion had moved to new billets at the adjoining villages of Réthonvillers and Marché-Allouarde, lying about three miles south-west of the town of Nesle, where we rejoined them, very tired after our long day's journeyings, at 10 p.m. The villages were of the usual ruined type, and there were no special features of interest in them, except the remains of a German 'bäkkerei' on the walls of which were a number of crude relief designs in

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cement. The billets were decidedly poor, and we were not at all anxious to make a long stay here. We were not expected to, as it happened, for on the 9th of January, after only two nights here, the move was resumed by march route, via Nesle, Voyennes, Matigny, and Foreste, to Etreillers. We halted for dinner in a field at Matigny alongside a French aerodrome. Several airmen obligingly carried out some very fine manœuvres, probably for our special edification or entertainment.

This country was all quite familiar to us, but when we arrived at Etreillers we found a number of changes had taken place. The industrious Frenchmen had carried out quite a number of minor building operations, utilizing the bricks and other materials from the ruins,and we thus found a fair number of one-storey brick huts, complete with fire-places, awaiting our occupation. We were thus a good deal more comfortable than on the previous occasion of our residence at Etreillers. There was plenty of fuel available, and we were able to build huge wood fires in the ample fire-places constructed by the French. The snow had disappeared some days since, but the weather remained cold, though not altogether unpleasant. It should be mentioned that we now formed part of the Fifth Army.

On the morning of the 10th of January, advance parties went into the line in the Fayet sector to remain twenty-four hours with the French, so as to ensure that the taking-over should be as complete and thorough as possible. The remainder of the battalion went into the line on the following day, relief being complete before

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midnight. On the way up to the line, in the evening, we passed numerous French troops and transport, the latter consisting mostly of little carts drawn by dogs, and containing the machine-guns and equipment of the already-relieved machine-gun sections.

The system we had now taken over in the Fayet sector consisted, firstly, of an outpost line made up of a series of strongly-wired redoubts, or strong points, sited so as to give mutual support, behind which ran a continuous trench with support trenches a short distance in rear; this outpost line was held by two companies. In the second place, a supporting company was located in dug-outs and shelters in rear of the outpost system and within easy reach of any portion of the front line. In the third place there was a theoretical line of resistance, known as the 'village line,' which was intended to consist of a series of very strongly fortified strong-points, chiefly on the sites of ruined villages, all having extensive command over the whole of the country in front and from one to another. Fresnoy-le Petit was such a village, but at the time of our arrival in this area, nothing much had been done beyond selecting the sites for the strong-points.

The line-holding battalion had its headquarters in a series of dug-outs on the western edge of Fayet village under the shelter of a high bank. The fourth, or counter-attacking company, was held in reserve in dug-outs in a so-called quarry behind Fayet. Its duty was to launch an immediate counter-attack if any portion of the outpost line should be attacked and captured by the enemy. The

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machine-gun corps had sections occupying sundry points of vantage in advance of the village line, with guns generally trained on fixed objectives, on which indirect fire could be brought to bear as required.

We soon found that the French had not been so merciful to the town of St Quentin as we had been during our previous occupation of this part of the line. The ever-present lofty cathedral had suffered the loss of its turret; the barracks had been partly demolished, and many houses had been shelled with effect. On the whole, the sector was very quiet, the only noticeable activity of the Boche being the frequency with which his gunners registered on the village of Fayet. The tour lasted from the 11th to the 15th of January, during which time very active patrolling and reconnaissance took place nightly, with the object of asserting our control of 'no man's land.' A good deal of useful wiring was also put out, and raids on the enemy's posts were frequently attempted.

By the end of this first tour a sharp thaw had set in, and the mud in the outpost line and in other parts became very difficult to negotiate, so much so that our relief on the 15th of January by the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment was a very sticky and tedious business, and was not completed in the one night, 'A' Company having to remain in until the following day. After relief, companies and headquarters moved back, independently, to Holnon Wood, parts of which, while in French occupation, had been converted into a veritable warren of dug-outs and subterranean passages. The whole of our battalion, with the exception of Transport and

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Quartermaster's Stores, which were at Villévêque, two miles away, was housed in a large series of these dug-outs not far from the village of Attilly.

The 16th was spent in cleaning up, inspections and the usual routine of getting over a tour in the line, and on the following day we were joined by a considerable number of new officers, of whom we were badly in need. These were Battye, Burgess, Groutage, D. C. Jones, R. Pitt, Macmillan, Reece, Slicer, Tolson, and Unsworth. They were made welcome, and were distributed among the companies, where they quickly adapted themselves to their new circumstances and settled down. The usual rather irritating working-parties had to be found almost as soon as we got out of the line.

In the evening of the 18th of January we moved back to Vaux, after handing over our dug-outs, etc., to the 2/4th Gloucesters, and we ourselves took over fairly good billets of similar type to those at Etreillers. We were glad to find that the Divisional 'Frolics' were in full swing in a large hut, which made a fine theatre, and an excellent programme was being presented, including an alleged pantomime.

Just now a good deal of attention was paid to company cooking arrangements, which, by the way, had always been of a high order. Very keen competition there was for the honour of best turned-out cooker and smartest and cleanest cook-house. It can truthfully be said that the battalion at this time was in as fine fettle as it had ever been, and yet, if we had known, a most disastrous blow was about to be dealt us.

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An Officers' Conference was held on the 21st of January, preparatory to a visit by the G.O.C. Division on the following morning, when ribbons were presented to a number of N.C.O's and men. We were now in reserve, and the usual duties of a unit in reserve were allotted to us. An extensive scheme of rear defences had been designed and sited. A 'Corps Line' of trenches, on which work had commenced,and in front of which some excellent wire defences had already been erected, passed north and south near Etreillers. An 'Army Line' was sited about three miles in the rear, and was to follow a line running near Foreste. Little or nothing, however, had yet been done to this system and attention was being concentrated on the 'Corps Line.' Accordingly, daily working parties absorbed nearly all available men from our battalion, as well as other reserve units, and the trenches on the 'Corps Line' were put in hand, although, for the present, they were only to be dug waist-deep. Attached to the 61st Division, temporarily, was the 200th Field Company R.E., belonging to the 30th Division, and the extensive trench-digging work was being sited by them, and carried out under their direct supervision, our working parties reporting daily to officers of the Royal Engineers. Other work, consisting of digging a narrow trench for a buried cable, also called for supplies of workers. This 'Corps Line' was well sited and played an important part in holding up the enemy advance for a considerable time at a later date, being the battle line or lines on which every possible resistance was to be offered to the enemy and to be defended to the last.

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The general war situation was beginning to look serious. Russia having defaulted and agreed to a shameful peace treaty, the German Army of the West was now being continually reinforced by divisions released from the Eastern front. The British Army had carried out, in 1917, a practically continuous offensive from the spring until the end of the autumn, and the enormous demands of the prolonged Passchendaele battle had largely depleted our reserves. Add to this, the fact that many miles of additional front had been just taken over from the French Army, and there seemed more than one reason why the enemy should choose some portion of the British front for the attack which he was obviously preparing to make.

After eight days in reserve the battalion again went into the line, on the 26th of January, this time in the Gricourt sector, taking over from the 2/5th Gloucesters after the usual reconnaissance had been made on the preceding day. The new sector lay immediately to the north of the Fayet sector, and ran close in front of the ruined village of Gricourt. It was much to be preferred to the Fayet sector, the soil being chalky and, in consequence, much drier. The system was similar in many ways to the one we had held in the previous tour, the counter-attack company being located in the ruins of Fresnoy-le-Petit.

We were glad to welcome the C.O. back, very much the better for his enforced rest, and he immediately resumed command. The weather had now much improved and had become quite spring-like. There was, therefore,

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plenty of opportunity for making improvements in the trenches and posts, and strengthening the wire, while the rear company put in several hours daily on the defences at Fresnoy. Patrolling throughout the night was compulsory for the front-line companies, and each company had to send in a written report, daily, indicating the extent of work done, and the direction taken by patrols during the preceding night.

Four days in the front line were followed by relief by the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and by our taking over the close support dug-outs and shelters in a chalk quarry behind Fresnoy, vacated by them. The next four days were uneventful, and were filled up with numerous tasks on the defences which were now being urgently pressed forward. We again took over from the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment in the front line on the 3rd of February. The daily and nightly routine continued as before, and on the night of the 5th of February 'D' Company carried out a silent raid on the enemy front line posts. No prisoners, however, were captured, neither were any of the enemy seen, and after spending some time vainly searching, the raiders returned. The enemy was very quiet at night, apparently sending out no patrols, rarely firing a Verey light, and generally giving very few signs of his existence or whereabouts. We did not quite understand his attitude, and the suspicion began to grow that trouble was brewing, perhaps even on our own front. A rumour reached us that aeroplane photographs had been taken behind the enemy's lines revealing a large number of new bridges

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over the St Quentin canal opposite our Corps front. The rumour placed the number as high as twenty-four.

What had become the usual four days' tour in the front line came to an end on the 7th of February, when we changed over again with the 2/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and returned to the chalk quarry behind Fresnoy. The tour just ended was the last in the front line which we were destined to carry out as a battalion. There had been talk for a considerable time of the re-organization of divisions on a basis of nine fighting battalions instead of twelve as heretofore. The number of brigades would remain at three as before. We had hoped that this was merely an idle tale, but the news was confirmed and followed up shortly afterwards by the upsetting information that six battalions of the 61st Division were to be broken up, and that ours was to be one of the six. The personnel of the disbanded battalions was to be divided up among the remaining battalions, bringing them up to full strength, and the large surplus was to be formed into temporary units to be known as Entrenching Battalions. These were to be utilized for intensive works on the rear defences, on which an enormous amount of work had yet to be done. In addition, a kilted three-battalion brigade of Scotchmen from the 51st Division was to come, *en bloc*, to the 61st Division, and would in future be known as the 183rd Brigade. These last-named duly arrived on the 11th of February, and one battalion took over our dug-outs and shelters in the chalk quarry. This done, our battalion left the forward area for the last time as a complete unit, marching back by companies, *via* Villé-

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vêque, to huts at Ugny l'Equipée. There was not much of Ugny itself left, although one or two new temporary houses had been erected. The huts we occupied were none too good, and the accommodation was rather limited.

A number of allotments of six months' home duty in England had been distributed among the various battalions to be disbanded, and the first to go from our battalion was Whiteley, whose health had become greatly impaired. He was followed shortly afterwards by Wooldridge. We were also flooded now with a most generous allotment of leave for officers and men. There were so many allotments for officers that we had difficulty in finding sufficient officers for them.

On arrival at Ugny, a tremendous hustle began in order to prepare the rolls of seventeen officers and 350 other ranks who were to be posted to the 2/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Nominal rolls and conduct sheets were required in a great hurry, and the personnel transferred were to report to their new unit on the 14th of February. On the morning of the 13th the battalion was finally inspected by the Brigadier, who gave a kindly and fitting address. In the evening of the same day—Ash Wednesday, by the way—all the officers met at a farewell dinner—the last meeting of the Battalion Mess. The Brigade Band was in attendance, and gave us of their best. They were duly rewarded by some of our best, and at the end of the evening were wise enough to remain for the night. The evening started gloomily enough, but our spirits rose as, one by one, Corporal

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Foster's dishes made their appearance and were demolished. It must be stated with regret that one or two of the instruments belonging to the Brigade Band returned to Brigade headquarters rather the worse for wear.

On the following morning, the 14th of February, with the exception of those on leave or on courses of instruction, the officers and men transferred to the 2/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment marched out of Ugny, under the command of Tonks. The C.O. took the salute for the last time, and those of us who were left behind gave them a regretful farewell, and wished them all good luck, as they moved off to join their new battalion at Attilly and Holnon Wood. All that remained to be done now was to prepare the rest of the battalion for their departure. These, together with the surplus of the 2/1st Bucks Battalion, were to be formed into the 25th Entrenching Battalion, under the command of Lieut.-Col. Muir of the 2/1st Bucks Battalion.

The final disbandment of the 2/8th Royal Warwickshire Regiment was completed on Friday, the 22nd of February, 1918, when the remainder of the officers and men, under Whatmore, marched out of Ugny l'Equipée to join the 2/1st Bucks surplus at Etalon and Curchy, near Nesle. A month later, most of this detachment were drafted also to the 2/7th in the opening days of the German offensive. A number of senior warrant officers and N.C.O.'s had gone down to the base depôt, and later became dispersed among various units.

The C.O. proceeded to England on leave, where he remained two months until given a new battalion. He

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took over his new command about the end of April, 1918, his new battalion being the 10th Cheshires. The 25th was a fighting Division, and had recently been through the March attack in the south and the April fighting in Artois. This had been followed by some hard and costly work, counter-attacking in the Kemmel area, which district they were about to leave when Colonel Cadman joined them. About three weeks later Farmer arrived to take over the Adjutancy. Moving by easy stages, the 25th Division gradually made their way south, arriving, about the 20th of May, in the Champagne country, where, with the 8th, 19th, and 21st Divisions, they were to assist the French in the great battle developing east and west of Reims. The 10th Cheshires moved up from reserve at Pévy (ten miles north-west of Reims), late on the 26th of May, on news being received that a heavy German attack was expected at eleven p.m. By 4 a.m. next morning they were involved and held their ground until 6 a.m., when a withdrawal was ordered, the division having been outflanked on the left. During the retirement, the Colonel, Farmer and two or three others were reconnoitring a new line of resistance near the village of Guyencourt, when they were attacked by a low-flying hostile aeroplane. They attempted to take cover, but the Colonel was hit and killed instantaneously, together with the Brigade Major, who was one of the party. Farmer was quite unaware of what had happened, until, rising to move on, and addressing the Colonel, he received no reply. Thus fell a very gallant officer.

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Major Phillips, after a short period with the 2/7th, eventually succeeded to the command of the 2/6th Royal Warwickshire Regiment; and of the remaining officers, Kitchin transferred to the Machine-gun Corps and left for Grantham, while the Quartermaster and I proceeded to England and became attached for a time to training divisions. The disbandment was especially sad to those of us who had been longest with what, to us, was 'The Battalion,' and wherever we found ourselves afterwards nothing could be quite the same. What happened to all of us afterwards it is not the purpose of this narrative to state; and if it had not been our misfortune to be disbanded, who can say what laurels the battalion might not have won in the great German offensive which broke out just a month after the dispersal?

But the spirit of the Old Battalion lives still; it lives in the periodical reunions of surviving officers and the ex-service men's associations; it lives in the King's Colour, which is laid up for all to see in Aston Parish Church; and if this book, poor though it may be, inadequate as it must needs be, helps in any way to preserve that spirit, its object has been achieved. In earlier days, a battalion was known by the name of its commander. It seems a pity that the practice was discontinued, in some respects, for, in our own case, we were, in every sense, 'Cadman's Battalion.'

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LIST OF OFFICERS WHO SERVED WITH THE 2/8th BATT. R. WARWICKSHIRE REGT

* These Officers made the great sacrifice.

Adams, H. McK
Ash, T. Freer, T. D., Lt.-Col.-
Ash, T. Freer (jun.)
Baddeley, P.
*Battye, H.
*Beer, J. H., Lt.-Col.
*Bell, R. D. (R.A.M.C.)
*Bennett, A. J., M.C. (C.F.)
Bevan, W. G., M.C.
Bowers, W. H.
Bradley, F. H.
Brettell, F. A.
*Brock, S. E., M.C.
Buckingham, T. H.
Burgess, G. J., M.C.
Burton, H. P. W. (C.F.)
*Cadman, E. C., D.S.O., Lt.-Col.
Cartland, J.
Chapple, W. G.
Chidgey, H. T.
Claydon, A. L., M.C.
Crisp, C. H.
*Davies, H.
Davis, E. G.
Deverell, A. C.
Douglas, W. J., Lt.-Col.
Downing, L.
Duckworth, T. C., M.C., D.C.M.
Entwistle, J.
*Evans, W. T. (R.A.M.C.)
Farmer, W. S., M.C.
Field, G. C.
Garland, A. J.
*Gibbins, R. B.
*Gilderthorpe, G.
Gough, H. F., M.C.
Graves, F. (R.A.M.C.)
Gray, F. J. S.
Green, L. H.
Griffiths, S. A.
*Groutage, J. H.
*Guest, R. V.
Gunter, W. E.
Hamilton, R. F.
Harper, J. C., M.C.
Hassal, J. A. S.
Hewins, W. T.
Hodgkins, G. F.
Hodgson, F. W.
*Hooton, E. C.
Hoskins, C., M.C.

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Hubbard, G. M.
Jessop, J. W.
*Jones, A. R.
Jones, D. C.
Kibbey, A. E., M.M.
Kitchin, C. H. B.
Laing, W. G.
Laing, R. R. J.
Lapham, J. D., M.C.
*Lefroy, T. E.
Leigh, F. G.
Llewellyn, A. B. L.
Lloyd, E. L.
Lloyd, R. W.
Lunt, R. O.
MacKay, W.
Mackintosh, D. (C.F.)
McClure, A.
Macmillan, J. B.
Macniven, D.
Middleton, P. C.
Morris, J. S.
Morrison, —(R.A.M.C.)
*Morton, W. R.
Mudford, H. E.
Mungle, J., M.C.
Newdigate, B. H.
North, — (M.O.R.C., U.S. Army)
Nuttall, J. R., Lt.-Col.
Parrott, W. T. J.
Parsons, B. K.
*Parsons, S. E.
Peskett, H. L.
Phillips, W. E., D.S.O., M.C., Lt.-Col.
Phipps, F. N.
*Pitt, D.
Pitt, R.
Prosser, A. L., M.C.
Reece, J. G.
Rich, M. D.
Richards, J.
Richards, C. J.
Rogers, A. A.
Rushforth, A. N.
Scott, T. A.
Scutt, W. R.
Shutt, W. R., M.C.
Shiach, D. A.
Simcox, J. R.
Slater, J. J., M.C.
*Slicer, W. G.
Sloane, R. E.
Smith, F.
Stephens, F. J.
*Stone, D.
Sunderland, H. Scott
Sutton, C.
Teague, J., M.C.

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Temple, H. E.
Thom, F. C. H.
*Tolson, H.
Tonks, A. E.
Tosland, A. L., M.C.
Trowell, A. A.
Tuke, G. H.
Tyler, J. L., M.M.
Unsworth, W.
Vickers, V. C. W. (R.A.M.C.)
Walker, S.
*Watson, K. C. F., M.C.
Wareham, C. G.
Westwood,
Whatmore, W. R. T. M.C. and Bar
*While, C. V.
Whitehill, R. D.
Whitehouse, P. H., D.S.O., Lt.-Col.
Whitehouse, W. E.
*Whiteley, C. T.
Wooldridge, J. W.
Whitaker, E. V. (M.O.R.C., U.S.Army)

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29747	Pte. A. Adie	5.12.17	
305741	Pte. F. L. Allen	5.9.17	
5689	Pte. J. C. Anderson	28.9.16	R. Scots
306854	Pte. F. E. G. Angell	27.8.16	
4999	Pte. J. Bacon	20.8.16	
5001	Pte. E. Ball	4.10.16	
306388	Pte. J. E. Barton	30.3.17	
325145	Pte. C. H. Bateman	7.9.16	Liverpool R.
307158	Cpl. J. T. Bates	6.9.17	Loyal N. L.R
3730	Pte. T. R. Beach	26.6.16	
306782	Pte. W. H. Beesley	27.8.16	
305471	Pte. G. H. Bell	1.7.16	
3691	Pte. T. B. Bennett	18.8.16	
5461	Pte. J. Bermingham	20.10.16	Loyal N.L.R.
5524	Pte. G. C. Berry	15.1.17	HampshireR.
3261	Pte. H. Berry	28.10.16	
307377	Cpl. H. Birch	6.12.17	Loyal N.L.R.
305276	Pte. R. Bodger	27.8.16	
5779	Pte. J. W. Bowers	25.8.16	Lan. Fus
5742	Pte. A. Bradbury	16.10.16	Manch. R.
203812	Pte. H. Bragg	31.3.18	
3713	Pte. W. Brazier	23.10.16	
306648	Pte. J. Bright	27.8.16	
5731	Pte. A. Brown	8.9.16	R. Scots
27968	Pte. F. G. Brown	15.4.18	
307141	Pte. P. Brown	6.9.17	R. Scots
307201	L.-Sgt. C. Butler	14.4.18	Hampshire R.
307171	Sgt. J. Calder	24.9.17	R. Scots

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306324	Pte. A. H. R. Casey	3.9.17	
306102	Pte. W. Chambers	7.9.17	
24054	Pte. O. M. Chatterley	22.8.17	
24649	Pte. A. College	3.9.17	
306965	Pte. F. Collier	19.4.17	Loyal N.L.R.
306699	Pte. E. A. Collins	27.8.16	
267924	Pte. H. C. Cornhill	22.4.18	
307254	Sgt. J. Corless	4.9.17	Loyal N.L.R.
1570	Pte. H. Cotterhill	18.7.16	
4773	Pte. A. W. Crisp	5.10.16	
3646	Sgt. J. D. Cowie	5.9.16	
1815	Pte. W. J. Crawford	10.7.16	
3647	Dmr F. H.Crowshaw	14.10.16	
307359	Sgt. C. R. Dale	3.9.17	Cheshire R.
5010	R.-S.-M. W. Davis	19.4.17	
2742	Sgt. C. H. Downard	16.8.16	
5760	Pte. F. Draw	20.7.16	HampshireR.
5704	Pte. P. F. Drummond	14.12.16	R. Scots
307022	Pte. F. P. Dyer	3.12.17	HampshireR.
5403	L.Sgt. A. Eccott	12.7.16	HampshireR.
4160	Pte. A. Farmer	18.7.16	
307465	Pte. F. A. Fisher	27.8.17	R. Berks R.
29523	Pte. A. Flynn	10.9.17	Cheshire R.
306093	Cpl. H. Foster	27.8.16	
305711	L.-Sgt. G. French	30.3.17	
305611	Pte. H. Friend	26.6.16	
307425	Pte. G. Gaines	15.12.17	
307437	Sgt. W. Gardener	6.12.17	R. Berks R.
4877	Pte. G. Gibbard	19.7.16	
328039	Pte. R. W. Gilkes	5.9.17	

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328055	Pte. J. R. Glaister	27.8.17	Loyal N.L.R.
29667	Pte. R. Gordon	24.3.18	S. Lancs R.
306379	Cpl. A. Grant	7.9.17	
5010	Pte. C. A. Grant	22.12.16	
307466	Pte. H. Hall	30.4.17	O.B.L.I.
4473	Pte. S. Hanson	7.7.16	
306033	L.-Sgt. J. F. Harris	3.9.17	
306342	Pte. H. Hartle	5.12.17	
24299	Pte. E. E. Hawkins	10.10.17	
24670	Pte. A. E. Hirons	13.4.18	
306819	Pte. S. P. Hodges	27.8.16	
6533	Pte. S. Hodgson	10.7.16	Loyal N.L.R.
306703	Cpl. E. H. Holden	10.10.18	
6417	Pte. W. Hough	6.9.16	Cheshire R.
307205	Pte. J. Houlder	10.3.17	Loyal N.L.R.
305600	Pte. J. Hunter	1.7.16	
306638	Pte. W. Ingram	27.8.16	
3200	Pte. A. Jones	9.7.16	
305878	Pte. A. Jones	1.7.16	
307030	Pte. H. Jones	30.3.17	Loyal N.L.R.
29526	Pte. W. Jones	14.4.18	Cheshire R.
306398	Pte. H. E. Kemp	30.3.17	
305810	Cpl. W. E. Kendall	6.9.17	
307156	Pte. J. Kenny	8.9.17	R. Scots
35390	Pte. A. Key	5.4.18	Middlesex R.
1788	Pte. W. J. Kidner	21.7.16	
306795	Pte. S. E. Langston	27.8.16	
306406	Pte. P. H. Lawrence	27.8.16	
4428	L.-Sgt. G. E. Leedham	14.8.16	
306019	Pte. T. Lester	1.7.16	

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5407	Pte. A. V. Lewis	20.7.16	HampshireR.
29686	Pte. E. Lightfoot	1.11.17	R.A.S.C.
29550	Pte. J. Lockley	4.9.17	Cheshire R.
5671	Pte. J. McKenzie	11.1.17	R. Scots
4943	Pte. E. Macauley	4.2.17	
305966	Pte. E. H. Mallin	14.4.17	
305175	Pte. W. Mander	17.8.17	
28954	Pte. C. March	7.9.17	Worc. R.
306983	L.-Cpl. E. Meredith M.M.	5.12.17	King'sOwn R.
29706	Pte. A. F. Miles	17.12.17	R.A.S.C.
306418	Pte. C. S. Miller	7.9.16	
306768	Pte. W. J. Miller	27.8.16	
3040	Pte. E. Milward	21.7.16	
306685	Pte. D. W. Morgan	27.8.16	
305885	Pte. J. Morris	1.7.16	
29654	Pte. H. Moss	3.12.17	S. Lancs. R.
4381	Sgt. E. H. L. Nicholls	5.12.16	
3973	Pte. A. E. Oakes	18.12.16	
305658	Pte. J. R. Owen	1.7.16	
307352	Sgt. F. S. Oxley	7.9.17	King'sOwn R.
307471	Pte. H. Pain	4.10.17	
306040	Pte. J. Painter	1.7.16	
———	Pte. T. Paget	20.12.19	
306414	Pte. H. L. Pearce	21.4.17	
305659	Pte. J. Perks	1.7.16	
306364	Cpl. B. Portman	1.4.17	
307273	Pte. G. P. Povey	4.9.17	
306302	Pte. J. Povey	6.9.17	
35182	Pte. F. J. Pratley	30.3.18	

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305024	Sgt. C. E. Ray, M.M.	29.10.18	Cadet
3341	L.-Cpl. H. T. Reddell	25.6.16	
325136	Pte. J. Reid	28.3.18	Liverpool R.
5413	L.-Cpl. W. A. Reynolds	29.10.16	Hampshire R.
306370	Pte. A. Richardson	4.9.17	
325119	Pte. J. Rigby	5.5.18	Y. & L. R.
268942	Pte. C. Roberts	30.10.18	
307510	Pte. A. C. Robertson	30.3.17	R.E.
22209	Cpl. A. G. Robinson	14.1.18	
3752	Pte. H. Rose	25.8.16	
306334	L.-Cpl. W. A. Rose	2.4.17	
1922	Pte. E. Rowe	1.7.16	
306407	Cpl. L. Rudge	30.3.18	
5684	Pte. H. Salmond	23.10.16	R. Scots
3229	C.-S.-M. J. H. Scrivener	19.9.16	
305623	Pte. G. Sears	1.7.16	
35189	Pte. T. N. Seeley	22.3.18	
4321	Pte. D. A. Shakespeare	12.7.16	
29691	Pte. P. J. Sheppard	28.9.17	R.A.S.C.
4396	Pte. F. T. Shiner	12.7.16	
29525	Pte. T. Sillitoe	3.9.17	Cheshire R.
307373	Pte. W. Singleton	7.1.18	Loyal N.L.R.
29718	Pte. F. Smith	31.3.18	
5673	Pte. G. Smith	25.6.16	R. Scots
306371	L.-Cpl. H. R. A. Smith	5.12.17	
306425	Pte. L. Smith	2.10.17	
306803	Pte. P. W. Smith	27.8.16	
35197	Pte. A. C. B. Stona	8.10.19	
307374	Pte. W. Stott	7.12.17	Loyal N.L.R.
5388	Pte. H. Strickland	30.7.16	King's Own R.

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5190	Pte. J. E. Sutcliffe	2.9.16	
306922	Pte. S. A. Tarrant	16.12.16	HampshireR.
24646	Pte. B. H. Thornton	15.11.17	
28938	Pte. W. Tompkins	8.12.17	
4434	Cpl. A. Topliss	5.9.16	
29745	Pte. J. T. Tory	24.9.17	
3821	Pte. E. Turner	26.6.16	
5601	Pte. J. Turner	12.8.16	Loyal N.L.R.
779	Pte. J. Twamley	11.7.16	
328043	Pte. P. Tyler	15.12.17	
328034	Pte. E. Veitch	24.3.18	
306996	L.-Cpl. R. J. Walker	30.3.17	King'sOwnR.
307157	Sgt. T. Walker	6.9.17	R. Scots
5559	Pte. J. Walsh	26.6.16	Loyal N.L.R.
306951	Pte. A. Ward	26.6.16	Loyal N.L.R.
305633	Pte. F. C. Wasley	1.7.16	
5665	Pte. F. Watson	31.7.16	R. Scots
5391	L.-Cpl. J. Watson	9.9.16	King'sOwnR.
27904	Pte. W. Watson	4.12.17	
306100	Pte. H. Watts	2.4.17	
307009	Pte. G. F. Weavers	14.12.17	HampshireR.
4750	Pte. P. Weedon	21.12.16	
5523	Pte. A. S. Wells	19.8.16	HampshireR.
2994	Pte. H. West	26.6.16	
306923	Pte. G. White	7.9.16	HampshireR.
5646	Pte. L. White	20.12.16	R. Scots
5657	L.-Cpl. J. Wilson	28.6.16	R. Scots
29677	Pte. — Woolagham	5.10.17	North'd Fus
29543	Pte. A. Yates	24.3.18	Cheshire R.

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N.C.O's AND MEN OF THE 2/8th R. WAR. R. KILLED AFTER TRANSFER TO THE 2/7th R. WAR. R.

328022	Pte. L. Bailey	19.9.19	
307294	Pte. J. Bann	21.4.18	R. Scots
305274	Cpl. J. Beathe	22.3.18	
305992	Pte. T. Bessant	18.4.18	
306955	Pte. T. Bewsher	22.3.18	King'sOwnR.
306516	Pte. J. Binnell	14.4.18	
203825	L.-Cpl. S. T. Bolton	12.4.18	
307486	Pte. G. Brookes	10.5.18	
305273	Pte. W. Cannon	13.4.18	
28945	Pte. A. G. Cheney	24.3.18	
307375	Pte. E. Clarkson	1.7.18	R. Scots
307487	Cpl. F. C. Clements	1.7.18	
266745	Pte. H. G. Coley	22.3.18	
307056	Pte. T. Colley	18.4.18	Loyal N.L.R.
29696	Pte. J. Cook	14.4.18	
328033	Pte. J. J. Cooke	1.11.18	
305750	Cpl. W. J. Crump	11.5.18	
306311	Pte. A. T. Daw	1.4.18	
306326	Pte.G.W.D.Dearlove	25.10.18	
306299	Pte. G. Ellis	1.11.18	
32880	Pte. G. Emms	24.10.18	R.A.S.C.
29699	Pte. H. R. Ewers	24.10.18	
305602	Pte. A. A. Heath	24.3.18	
307582	Pte. G. C. Hinton	18.4.18	War. Yeo.
307396	Pte. W. Irons	24.3.18	
29278	Pte. A. Macro	6.6.18	Norfolk R.
305884	Pte. C. W. Morris	1.11.18	

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306976	Pte. J. Muckalt	12.4.18	King'sOwnR.
32879	Pte. A. Pearce	23.3.18	Hussars
306918	Cpl. W. Pullinger	6.4.18	HampshireR.
29524	Pte. S. Raynor	23.3.18	Cheshire R.
307585	L.-Cpl. G. Robbins	22.3.18	War. Yeo.
457	Pte. A. P. Rowe	12.3.18	
306920	Pte. J. R. Series	15.4.18	HampshireR.
306930	L.-Cpl. J. M. Sharp	29.4.18	HampshireR.
———	Pte. J. F. Stanford	1920	
306315	Pte. J. Smith	14.4.18	
32999	Pte. C. R. Southgate	23.3.18	Hussars
203510	L.-Cpl. W. E. Styles	21.3.18	
306402	Pte. W. Summers	24.3.18	
307504	Pte. E. Thompson	22.3.18	R.E.
325128	Pte. W. Townley	2.11.18	Liverpool R.
307147	Pte. J. Walker	30.3.18	R. Scots
306999	L.-Cpl. G. Webster	23.3.18	King'sOwnR.
35203	Pte. T. H. Weeks	22.3.18	
307461	Pte. S. C. Wells	24.3.18	R. Berks R.
28942	Pte. W. J. Wenmouth	22.3.18	
307509	Pte. A. T. Whyte	24.3.18	R.E.
35208	Pte. H. R. Willmott	16.4.18	
35211	Pte. H. S. Wright	13.4.18	

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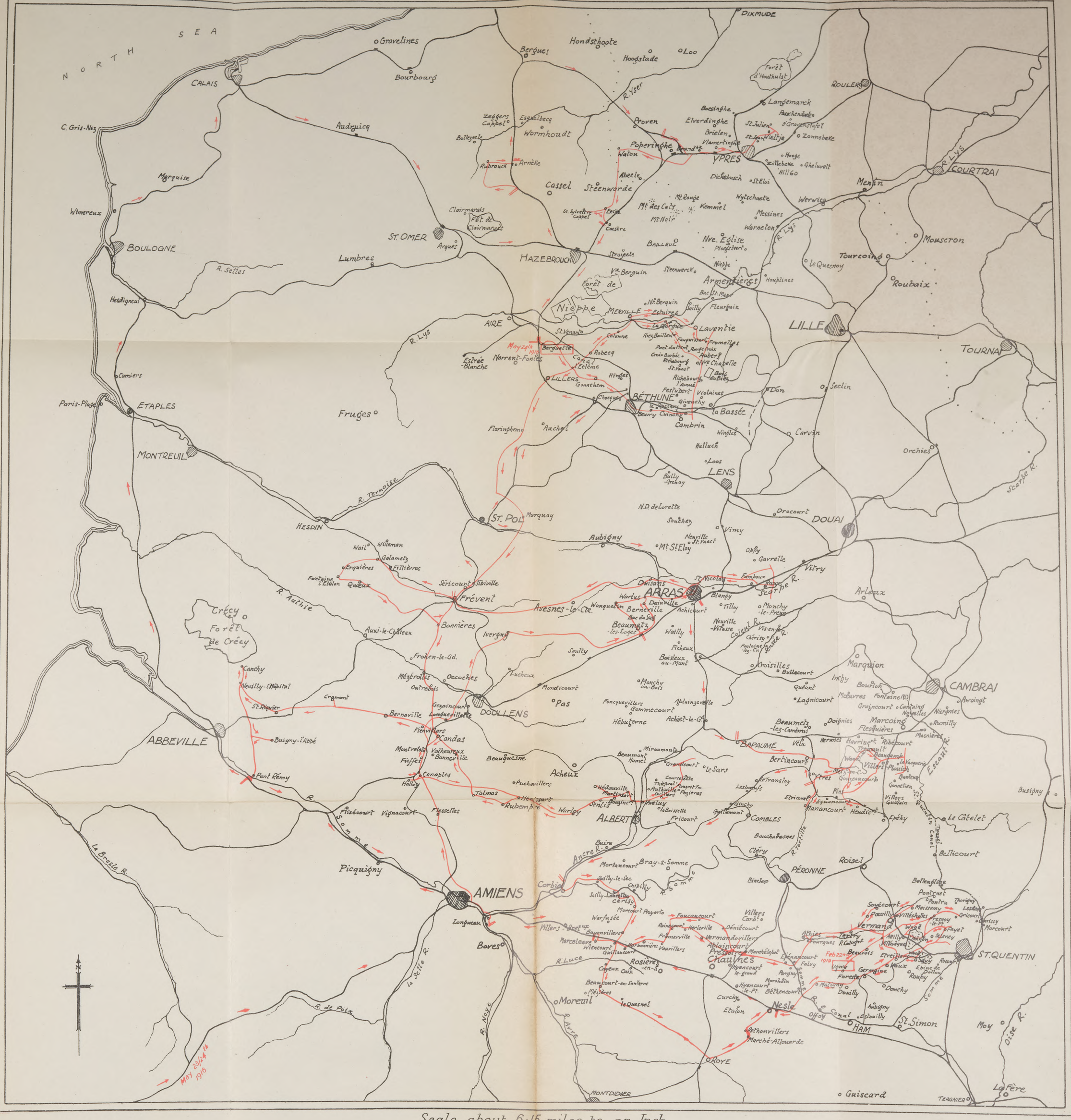
Sketch Map to illustrate Movements of the 2/8th. Battn. R. Warwickshire Regt.



Scale about 6·15 miles to an Inch.

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